APRIL

UNCANNY STORIES

UNUSUAL GRIPPING STORIES

15¢

UNCANNY STORIES

15¢

APRIL

COMING OF THE GIANT GERMS

exciting feature-length novel by RAY CUMMINGS

BEYOND HELL

by R. DEWITT MILLER

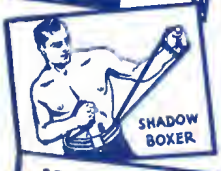
ALSO GREAT STORIES BY DAVID H. KELLER DENIS PLIMMER AND OTHERS

THE EARTH-STEALERS thrilling novelet by F. A. KUMMER, JR.

NOW! GET BIG HUSKY MUSCLES WITH NEW 37 FEATURE BODY BUILDER

OK! AMERICA LET'S GET IN SHAPE!

Posed by Professional Model



HERE'S WHAT YOU GET!

Send No Money Now!

With the complete **Hercules Muscle Building Training Course**, you get everything needed to whip yourself into superb shape, and at the same time learn the inside tricks of physical culture. You get a big, husky **TEN CABLE EXERCISER** adjustable to **200 pounds** resistance. These **adjustable cables** allow graduated and regulated muscle development. You can start with but 4 or 5 cables and gradually add on more as you feel yourself getting stronger.

In addition, you get real durable **TEN CABLE HANDLES** . . . actually built for ten cables and not two five-cable exercisers. All cables are woven in tough **extra heavy strands** to give long life.

The **WALL EXERCISER** equipment is an ideal builder of big biceps, strong backs, stomach muscles . . . great for reducing waistline.

If you like boxing, you will find the **SHADOW BOXER** just the thing you need. A regulation **SKIP ROPE** is also supplied. **ROWING MACHINE ATTACHMENTS** for back and shoulder muscles. **HEAD HARNESS** and **FOOT HARNESS** (adjustable) for strong neck and ankles. Heavy-duty **HAND GRIP** like boxers use. **Food Facts** for vitality. **How to develop chest expansion.** What to do for **strong legs.** Special feature **for men only.** Comprehensive **illustrated charts. How to get strong. Muscle gauge** to test your own strength. **Special 30-day training program.** What to do each day. **Jiu Jitsu** and **wrestling holds.** Popularity. Success. Here is everything you could possibly need to give you that strong, healthy body you have always wanted.

Can You Qualify As PHYSICAL DIRECTOR?

Are you physically equipped to teach and train physical development exercises and conduct mass calisthenics? America will need thousands of qualified physical directors as part of the vast new National Defense and Health Program. Right now, many large industrial organizations are planning **regulated physical training** for employees. The call is already going out for qualified and competent instructors . . . men who know how to lead others in building strong, healthy, rugged bodies. **Are you ready?**

You can't hope to be eligible for one of these good-pay jobs if you are thin, weak and puny. Nor can you make the grade if you are big, soft and flabby! Why not whip yourself into shape now. **Get your Hercules Outfit today.**

You get all this for only **$3.49.** **Think of it.** Practically a complete gymnasium right **in your own home. Send no money now.** Just fill out the coupon below with your name and address and we will ship everything out by return mail. When package arrives, pay postman only **$3.49,** plus postal charges. Outside U.S. cash with order. **Institute for Physical Development, 49 E. 21st St., Dept. C-86, New York, N. Y.**

$3.49 SEND NO MONEY

MAIL COUPON TODAY!

Institute for Physical Development
49 E. 21st St. (Dept. C-86)
New York, N. Y.

Please rush me the complete **Hercules Muscle Building Training Outfit** by return mail. I will pay postman **$3.49,** plus postal charges when package arrives.

Name.....

Street.....

City..... **State**.....

IF you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

Not a magic formula—not a get-rich-quick scheme—but something more substantial, more practical.

Of course, you need something more than just the desire to be an accountant. You've got to pay the price—be willing to study earnestly, thoroughly.

Still, wouldn't it be worth your while to sacrifice some of your leisure in favor of interesting home study—over a comparatively brief period in your life? Always provided that the rewards were good—a salary of $2,000 to $10,000?

An accountant's duties are interesting, varied and of real worth to his employers. He has *standing!*

Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, don't be too sure. Very possibly they *can* be!

Why not, like so many before you, investigate LaSalle's modern Problem Method of training for an accountancy position?

Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large accounting house under the personal supervision of an expert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied accounting principles and solved problems day by day—easy ones at first—then the more difficult ones. If you could do this—and if you could turn to him for advice as the problems became complex—soon you'd master them all.

That's the training you follow in principle under the LaSalle Problem Method.

You cover accountancy from the basic Principles right up through Accountancy Systems and Income Tax Procedure. Then you add C. P. A. Training and prepare for the C. P. A. examinations.

As you go along, you absorb the principles of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Statistical Control, Organization, Management and Finance.

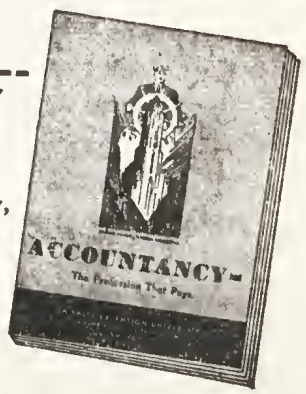
Your progress is as speedy as you care to make it—depending on your own eagerness to learn and the time you spend in study.

Will recognition come? The only answer, as you know, is that success *does* come to the man who is really *trained.* It's possible your employers will notice your improvement in a very few weeks or months. Indeed, many LaSalle graduates have paid for their training—with increased earnings—before they have completed it! For accountants, who are trained in organization and management, are the executives of the future.

Write For This Free Book

For your own good, don't put off investigation of *all* the facts. Write for our free 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays." It'll prove that accountancy offers brilliant futures to those who aren't afraid of serious home study. Send us the coupon *now.*

Over 1850 Certified Public Accountants among LaSalle alumni



LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

4101 S. Michigan Ave., Dept. 392-HR, Chicago, Ill.

I want to be an accountant. Send me, without cost or obligation, the 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays," and full information about your accountancy training program.

Name.....

Address..... *City*.....

Position..... *Age*.....

UNCANNY STORIES

ALL STORIES BRAND NEW
WRITTEN ESPECIALLY
FOR THIS MAGAZINE

Vol. 1, No. 1 ★ ★ CONTENTS ★ ★ April, 1941

★ ★ 2 STARTLING FEATURE NOVELS ★ ★

★ ★ AMAZING NOVELETTE OF THE FUTURE ★ ★

★ ★ 3 EXCITING SHORT STORIES ★ ★

UNCANNY STORIES published every other month by Manvis Publications, Inc. Office of publication, 4600 Diversey Ave., Chicago, Ill. Entry as second class matter, pending at the Post Office at Chicago, Ill., under act of March 3rd, 1879. Editorial and Executive offices, 330 W. 42nd Street, N. Y. Contents copyright 1941 by Manvis Publications, Inc. Yearly subscription 90 cents. Not responsible for unsolicited scripts.
PRINTED IN U. S. A.

COMING OF THE GIANT

The murderous phantoms were made out of the tail of the comet—

CHAPTER I
MURDEROUS PHANTOMS

"MISS EARTH! In bestowing on you this title which you have so fairly won—Yvette Allaire, we salute your beauty, your accomplishments and your perfection with humble adoration. Miss Earth, we pay you tribute!"

The spokesman for the Judging Committee knelt before Yvette. The cheers from the assembled throng were deafening. I stood near the platform with my heart quickened. For me the gay, flag-bedecked scene was blurred; the mounting tiers of seats filled with applauding people; the boxes resplendent with pompous dignitaries from many nations of the world—and the line of girls on

SPINE-FREEZING FEATURE-LENGTH NOVEL OF SATAN'S OWN STEPSONS, OF AN

GERMS

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "The Thought Machine," etc.

and they'd finally abduct every one of Earth's lovely daughters!

The Things *would come again when the Comet was in the northern sky, the thirty girls famous for their beauty would disappear one by one—Bob Dean knew he could never save his own lovely fiancée, for the murderous phantoms were Satan's own stepsons, they'd been spawned in the wake of the Comet and they'd thrive there forever!*

the dais, each the pick of her race, competing here for the one great title—all of it for me was blotted away so that there was only Yvette, whom so soon I was to marry. It was as though all this were being done to show me the worth

of the prize I had already won. Miss Earth! Most accomplished, most beautiful girl in the world.

And then, as soon as she could, Yvette came down with a soft little shawl draping her beauty and singled me out. You have read about her, of course. You have seen her moving image and heard her re-created voice many times. Small, slim, with long black hair; figure voluptuous, yet somehow with the chastity of girlhood radiating from it. Her small oval face—British-American from her father and dark with the Latin of her French mother; a face with a pert, pixie quality; a born coquette, with nothing of conventional beauty; and with a winning, frank smile, irresistible. You've heard newscasters rave like that. But no one ever saw her with her face so flushed with excited pleasure and a queer misty sparkle in her deep blue eyes as she had that moment when in her triumph she came running to me.

"I wanted to win, Bob," she murmured, "so you'd be proud of me." And then the pixie look came with her impish smile as she gazed at me slant-eyed. "You—still want to marry me, don't you?"

I'll skip what I said. It isn't important to this narrative. You can guess it anyway. Nor would I rave like this over Yvette save that I want to set down here, as simply, as clearly as I can, a factual account of those weird incidents into which Yvette and I were plunged. Her beauty was a motivating force in that sinister affair, so that of necessity I dwell upon it.

My name is Robert Dean. I was twenty-four years old, that summer of 1994. An aeroplane salesman. I lived, in upper New York City, alone with my younger brother, James Dean. He was only sixteen, that summer. I am just an average fellow. Certainly of no importance—big and rangy and not very good looking. Jimmy was colorful. Small, wiry, handsome. He was a flyer. Headstrong little devil; at fourteen, with his flying license, he'd run away from home and joined a traveling air-show—the sort of thing that in former days they called a honky tonk. He had quit that now and was demonstrator and flying instructor, working for the same company that employed me.

So much for us Deans . . . I had no chance to see Yvette for that week following the contest. My company sent me out of New York; and Yvette went back to her little summer cottage in Quebec Province, where she lived with a housekeeper-companion . . .

The comet was visible in the northern sky. It had been discovered by astronomers the previous March. You read about it then, of course; but probably, like Jimmy and myself, you were only mildly interested. The elements of its orbit had been calculated. It was, they said, not a visitor from outer space, but a member of our Solar System. It had, doubtless, always been here—a dark little globe, in effect no more than an asteroid—a planetoid—which by chance had never approached Earth close enough to be seen. But it was coming close now; and had, by what mysterious manifestation of nature no astronomer could say, just this year developed its luminosity, its tail streaming backward from the Sun. I remember reading the main facts of its calculated orbit—a somewhat narrow elliptical path, in a different plane from that of the Earth, and with an orbital axis at almost right angles to ours. In effect its path rounded the Sun just outside Mercury's orbit, and then swung out half way between Earth and Mars.

Pedantic celestial facts. They meant very little to me. But the comet itself, now in mid-July, on clear nights was an

awe-inspiring spectacle—tiny glowing dot, with its giant fan-shaped tail streaming out behind it among the stars. No wonder the people of former centuries were frightened when a comet appeared. Portent of doom. We of the modern world have no such superstition, of course; and yet I own, as I stared at it those nights, there was within me a queer feeling of dread. A portent of evil . . .

Then came that momentous evening near the end of July. I was at home alone, idly listening to the newscasters. And suddenly I tensed. An item from Benningon, Vermont.

"World Beauty Mysteriously Attacked. Anita Ibanez, winner of the second prize in the recent World Contest, victim of weird assault . . ."

I listened, breathless. The little Spanish beauty who had been second to Yvette. There had been eye-witnesses—two hunters, coming in from the foothills behind the city. They had heard the girl scream; and from a rocky promontory which looked down upon the garden of the small suburban home where she was staying, they had seen her struggling there in the moonlit darkness. Gruesome assailant—a weird, luminous upright blob had suddenly seemed to envelop the girl . . .

Monstrous details. The police of course could not credit such things. Both the young hunters maintained that they had seen a phosphorescent, shapeless thing wrapping itself around the struggling girl; a thing that glowed pallid green. A ghost, glowing visible in the moonlight. They were afraid to fire—it could only have killed the girl. They shouted, climbed down from the little height and ran for the garden. But the girl and her ghastly assailant were gone.

And as I sat numbed, listening, the newscaster switched and there was another . . . A camp of young girls on a lake near Rutland. They were being visited, this weekend, by several of the contest girls, who with chaperons were touring New England. They were camping on a small island. And the party had been attacked. There were ten girls and an elderly man and woman, there on the island. The old couple was found dead—and the girls were gone.

MURDEROUS ghosts. Who could credit such talk as that? But this newscaster, like the other, was describing how upright luminous shapes had been seen in the woods, in the vicinity of that Vermont lake . . .

The sound of my living room door behind me opening, made me turn, with taut nerves so jumpy that a thrill of terror stabbed into me. It was Jimmy. He stood there grinning at my start of surprise; his black hair tousled, his boyish, handsome face flushed from running up our entrance incline. And then he saw my expression.

"Good Lord, Bob," he gasped. "What's the matter? You look as though you'd just seen a ghost."

I told him the news reports, and he stared blankly. "Why—contest girls being attacked?" And he added suddenly: "Where is Yvette?"

Yvette! She had leaped instantly into my own mind, of course. Could it be that these weird abductions were inspired by the publicity given the girls in that contest? Their beauty, a lure? For whom? For ghastly, luminous things—supernatural?

"Yvette's up in Cap Rouge," I said. "Little town, near Quebec City." I was suddenly in a panic. "I'll call her."

I reached for our audiphone, but it buzzed with an incoming call before I could reach it.

"Robert Dean? . . . Oh, you Bob—Oh I'm so glad to connect you."

Yvette's voice. Low, tense, urgent.

"You're all right?" I demanded. "You've heard the news?"

"News? What news? Oh Bob—"

I skipped it. "What'd you call me for, Yvette?"

Jimmy at my elbow, murmured, "Tell her you want visible connection. Can't she give it?"

I pressed the visible signal. She accepted it; the little grid glowed with the image of her beautiful face—pallid, frightened. Her rustic living room was almost dark behind her.

"What is it, Yvette?"

"Oh Bob, I don't know. I'm just—frightened. Anita called me a while ago—"

Anita Ibanez, one of the girls who now was missing. "Called you, why?"

"She had no chance to talk—just murmured something about a ghost that seemed to be roaming outside. And then the connection was broken. Oh Bob, I thought maybe you could come up here tonight to be with me—"

"Well I sure will. Yvette, listen—you and Mrs. Grant—you stay indoors. Keep the house locked—"

"Yes. It is locked. But Mrs. Grant—she's away tonight—"

Yvette, up there alone! I hung up in a moment . . . "I'm going with you," Jimmy declared.

We were ready within five minutes; dashed up to the little roof landing stage overhead. And in another minute, in my small Wasp, we were slanting up into the starlight. I was cold and tense. Yet it seemed perhaps unnecessary alarm. Yvette was several hundred miles from those other girls who had been attacked . . .

THE night was cloudless, almost windless, with brilliant stars strewn on the deep purple of the sky. My little single-cabin Wasp could do a good five hundred. We were soon high over the silver ribbon of Lake Champlain, then swinging north-east for Quebec. Jimmy, usually talkative, hardly spoke. Then he switched on our public-wave receiver. For a time there seemed nothing of interest; and then abruptly we were stricken, numbed.

Mysterious flyer seen in the stratosphere over Vermont . . . Professor Alten, of the Mt. Killington Observatory reports—"

Breathlessly we listened. A strangely shaped air-vehicle had been briefly seen at an immense height—apparently headed northward . . . And on top of that, from Bennington, Vermont came another weird item . . .

"Noted Physicist Sees Roaming Ghost . . . Dr. Charles Bancroft, working late in his private research laboratory—within a mile of the home of Anita Ibanez, who tonight was abducted by a mysterious, ghost-like assailant—reports seeing the same ghost-like shape outside his home . . ."

Weird report indeed! Dr. Bancroft by chance had been examining the comet with his spectroscope. Then he had seen, outside his laboratory window, a luminous, upright ghostly shape. He had swung his instrument upon it to confirm the weird thought which had leaped into his mind. The luminous blob lurking there in his garden gave the same spectroscopic band as the tail of the Comet!

The learned scientist stared numbly, with horror transfixing him. *These murderous phantoms were made out of the tail of the Comet!*

CHAPTER II

Gruesome Puzzle

DR. BANCROFT had only an instant glimpse, and then the ghostly apparition at his garden gate was gone . . .

Jimmy and I—hearing about it now from the newscaster—blankly stared at each other, white-faced. Jimmy was trying lugubriously to grin. "What in the devil, Bob? What's that mean? These ghost-murderers—made of the tail of a Comet?"

I had no answer. Through the cabin vizor-pane of our little Wasp I could see the Comet up there in the northern sky—great streaming tail of luminous mist, arching out among the stars. Streaming electroid gases? Glowing powdered stardust, repulsed by the Sun, streaming backward . . . Even now in 1994 there was no one, I knew, who could define the exact nature of that weird tail . . . And here was a noted physicist finding it at his garden gate—a Thing that could attack a girl, envelop her, carry her off . . .

Fantastic thoughts leaped at me—a thousand shuddering conjectures, so gruesome that I flung them away . . . And suddenly Jimmy was murmuring,

"I've heard of that Dr. Bancroft. One of his daughters was in the contest—all three of them are famous beauties—"

He got no further. A newscaster's voice from our radio was bringing still another ghastly item . . . *"Dr. Bancroft, of Bennington, Vermont, found murdered! His three daughters, supposedly in the house adjacent to his laboratory, are missing—"*

An organized attack! Thirty girls at least, almost all of them famous for their beauty, had been abducted! By whom? By what? And Yvette, up here in Canada, alone in her cottage—

We had crossed the St. Lawrence now. I was slanting us down, with the little habitant villages somnolent in the starlight beneath us. Queer how this little part of the great Americas has remained backward—peaceful countryside drowsing with the aspect of a hundred years ago . . . Yvette's cottage stood in the wooded foothills of the Laurentides, almost alone, with the little village of Cap Rouge about two miles away.

We swooped down, silent as a bird, and landed on the small leveled stage a few hundred feet from the house. Weird silence was here in the crisp Canadian air—silence that seemed suddenly pregnant with terror so that Jimmy and I, for an instant, stood together at the foot of the stage, tensely staring around us. There was nothing but starlit trees, and a little rocky path that led over to the house.

"Keep beside me," I murmured. "She's in there—surely she must be—"

If only I had notified the authorities to come here and protect her. If only—

Futile regrets. The small, single-story house, with its back against a rocky little cliff, was dark and silent. We followed the path. Both of us were unarmed. I cursed myself for that too; but we had come so hastily, and the accursed Inspectors down in New York might have held us up an hour before issuing us civilian-weapons.

"Nothing out here, Bob—"

"No. She's evidently got the house locked, waiting for us—"

Suddenly my nostrils were dilating . . . A weird, acrid smell was here in the night air . . . Jimmy nodded when I whispered it. A smell like nothing I had ever before encountered. Faint, but pungent. Not unpleasant . . .

A DIM light suddenly flashed on in the house. The front door opened. Yvette! All my weird terrors dropped away with a rush of thankfulness as her slim, trousered figure appeared, silhouetted in the doorway with the light-glow behind her.

"You, Bob? Oh—hello, Jimmy—I'm so glad you're here—"

She was all right. Frightened, so that after calling me she had sat in her

dark living room, waiting for us to arrive. And now she had heard the newscasters' weird reports.

"What could it all be, Bob? That talk of ghosts made out of stardust—"

We gathered in the rustic living room. Just a dim, tube-light was over us. The windows were luminous, pallid rectangles from the silvery night outside.

"Bob, there's something I think I ought to tell you," Yvette suddenly was murmuring. "Something about my family—"

I had known Yvette only some two years. She was an orphan, with almost no close relatives. Jimmy and I sat with her now, here in the silent Canadian cottage as she told us about her father—things which now, in the light of these weird happenings tonight, intuition seemed making her feel that out of her own past, this menace might be coming . . .

Her father had been Dr. George Allaire, in his day a famous research physician. Then he had been ill, and the world thought that he had permanently retired, living with Yvette in a small New England village.

"But in reality, when his health came back," Yvette was saying, "he worked very hard. My uncle—Jean Lafayette, my mother's brother—was with us. What they were doing they wanted kept very secret."

I had heard of Jean Lafayette. Twenty years ago, there had been talk that he was working on an anti-gravity principle—the secret of spaceflight . . . Then apparently he had given it up. But in reality, some three years ago, with Yvette and her father, a spaceship had been secretly built. Never tested, but they were convinced that it would operate successfully.

And simultaneously Dr. Allaire had been working on a radioactive product, designed to kill all alien organisms which lodge in the human body. An advance upon the science of radiotherapy. A germ-killer, that still would not injure the delicate human tissues. And since even the normal deterioration of the human body—"old age" itself—by Metchnikoff and his followers had been proven to be of bacterial cause, by killing the bacteria, man would be made immortal. Immense discovery indeed. Save for accident, humans would live—a century, two centuries—in theory at least, to live in the full flower of health and strength, forever!

"But father was balked," Yvette was saying. "The basic substance he needed for his electronic products—only traces of it had ever been found on Earth. Then he and Uncle Jean discovered evidences of it—by spectroscopic search—on a little dark planetoid which just that year faintly was beginning to glow. It showed that there was the radioactive *antibacterite,* as he called his theoretic substance."

And thus her father and uncle had decided to keep their work secret. The treasure they sought was on a distant heavenly body—and they had the space vehicle with which perhaps to get there. Both of them feared unscrupulous exploitation of their discoveries . . . It was their plan to present suffering humanity with eternal freedom from disease—and with the secret of spaceflight also—momentous new era about which the world had speculated so long.

"And what did they do?" Jimmy demanded tensely.

YVETTE for a moment silently regarded us. "I don't know. I was away for a week—I came back—they were gone. Father's medical apparatus was gone. And the spaceship—gone—"

And true to her promise to keep silent, the girl had been waiting—picturing her father and her uncle, out somewhere among the stars . . . The thing

brought to my mind a flood of weird questions . . . That planetoid — had Allaire and Lafayette gone there? A little world, just beginning to glow? Could that planetoid be this flaming comet which now had flung its tail across the northern sky? The newscaster's mention of a "weird air-car" in the stratosphere tonight—was it a space vehicle? Jean Lafayette's spaceship? Brought back here with weird marauders who were abducting girls? Luminous ghosts with the spectra of the glowing tail of the comet!

Weird, gruesome puzzle . . . "And there is something else I think I must tell you," Yvette was tensely murmuring. "These abductors, they—they must want me also. Because there was a man—his name was Thomas Tarl—father's chief assistant. You see he also disappeared—and—Oh I can't help thinking that—"

She got no further. Her apprehensive, half incoherent words ended with a sudden little cry of terror as abruptly our living room tubelight was extinguished! For that second, as blank darkness leaped upon us, we all three jumped to our feet and stood numbed. I was aware vaguely of that weird smell —here in the dark living room with us.

We had no time to do anything. I felt Yvette clutch me in terror; heard Jimmy's low muttered oath. Then a faint sound behind us made me turn . . . Ghastly thing! It stood in the archway that led to the dark dining room of the cottage—upright, phosphorescent shape. A phantom? Surely it was not that. Beneath its impalpable glowing green light, there seemed the solid outline of a body. It was as though some weird form of solid, ponderable flesh were self-luminous . . .

Instant thoughts. I recall that I tried to shove Yvette behind me. I heard Jimmy give a muttered exclamation of horror as he crouched to spring at the damnable thing which now was moving toward us.

Then something whizzed through the darkness; crashed on my skull. The dark living room seemed to go up into a burst of white light in my head—roaring white-light, star-filled. I felt my knees buckling. Jimmy had leaped . . . Then there was only Yvette's scream of terror fading in my ears as my senses were whirled away into the black soundless abyss of unconsciousness.

CHAPTER III

The Thing in the Spaceship Corridor

I CAME to myself with the realization that I was lying on a floor, with the very dim outlines of a dark room around me. Weakly, with my head still roaring, I tried to sit up.

"Thank God—you're all right now, Bob?"

It was Jimmy, crouching here in the darkness beside me. I could see that we were in a small vaulted cubby. There was a latticed bullseye window, with blue-white starlight filtering in. A space-vehicle? The little metal room was vibrationless; but in the silence I could hear the vague throb and whine of an electroid current.

"Got us," Jimmy murmured. "Take it easy, Bob—you'll be all right now, I guess. Nasty crack on the head."

Blood was matted in my hair from a ragged scalp wound. I was weak and dizzy. Beside me the faint starry dimness disclosed Jimmy, pale, tense, but he seemed uninjured.

"They melted through the back door of Yvette's house," he was saying. "I quit fighting when I saw they'd kill you and Yvette—and me too. No chance."

"Yvette—she's safe?"

"Safe?" Jimmy's grin was lugubrious. "Sure—if you can call it that. She's here on board—we're off the Earth now—long ago—headed, where? I'll be damned if I know. They just slammed me in here with you." His cold hand was trembling on mine. "Lord, Bob, you gave me a scare—just lying here—"

"I'm all right." My head was clearing, though it ached like the devil; and my strength was coming back. "Jimmy, listen—these luminous things that caught us—what are—"

I got no further. Behind us a door slide opened with a slit of dim light. A pallid, phosphorescent shape stood there. One of the ghastly things—huge as a six foot man. I tried to struggle up, but Jimmy held me.

"Easy—take it easy, Bob—"

The light from the door oval was from a low vaulted corridor outside. It brightened our little cubby; and now I saw that the advancing shape was a bulky, thick-set giant of a man. For a second his body was just a dim dark outline within the luminous pale-green aura of phosphorescent glow. Body, self-luminous, the weird radiance streaming from it. Then as our cubby brightened from the outside light, the radiance dimmed. I lay on one elbow, staring, numbed. This wasn't a weird gruesome being from some other world. The light revealed him fully now—a burly beetle-browed fellow, with a bullet head of close clipped black hair. His heavy face leered down at us. An Earthman. He was dressed in boots, trousers and a soiled, ragged heavy shirt, open at his muscular hairy throat.

But still, Heaven knows, he was weird enough. Even in the tubelight here now his body glowed with that unearthly pallid radiance, streaming out through his clothes to hang like an aura around him.

"Hello Durkin," Jimmy said. "What you want?"

"So he didn't die?" The giant grinned. "I thought he would—with that crack."

"And no thanks to you," Jimmy retorted. "Let us out of here. Take us to your boss—"

Through the door oval the distant voices of frightened girls were audible; a blended, muffled murmur. Durkin gestured and grinned.

"Nice cargo we got this trip," he leered. He stood with his feet planted wide, swaying a little. The smell of alcoholite seemed wafting from him. And that other smell, which we had noticed outside Yvette's cottage. The smell of the weird radiance? It seemed now like something which was exhilarating—strengthening. It seemed to ease my aching head. Was it something medicinal, this weird streaming phosphorescent aura?

"Where are you taking us?" I demanded. "What's the idea of all this—and that girl Yvette, if you harm her—"

"She is safe," Durkin leered. "The Master Sybaris took a lot of trouble to get that girl—" He laughed with coarse, half-drunken amusement. "Nothing but the best for us. Quite a little beauty, she is. I wouldn't mind her for myself, that's a fact—if anything should happen to the master."

ANOTHER weirdly luminous figure appeared at the doorway—a boyish figure, young and slim as Jimmy. He was carrying a tray of food and drink. "Sybaris wants you," he said to Durkin. "Oh—so the big fellow didn't die? All right. I've got food for them both."

Durkin left us. The boy put down his tray and lingered. He was a raggedly dressed little fellow; pale blue eyes; sandy hair; a boyish face. Certainly he did not seem over sixteen.

"What's your name?" I demanded.

"Larry. Larry Franks. Take your food. It'll set you up." As though with sudden decision he went to the corridor door, slid it closed, and came back and sat beside us. In the greater darkness now he was weirdly luminous with the radiance streaming out of him. "I guess I want to talk to you," he murmured. "You're our first prisoners, except the girls. I—I want to tell you I'm sorry now I'm in this damned thing—" He lowered his voice. "I want to get out of it."

Amazing things which this youth Larry now furtively told us. But they were facts—incredible, but facts nevertheless—fitting into what Yvette had told us of her father and her uncle. Larry had been a prisoner in a State Institution—guilty of an offense for which perhaps he was not wholly responsible. There had been a jailbreak, and Larry had found himself released with a gang of others who had a stolen space-vehicle, and with it, escaped from earth . . .

"Sybaris had two brothers in that jail," he was telling us. "So he released them. Now there's about a hundred of us altogether. The New Empire, they call it."

"Sybaris?" I echoed. "Who is he? What's Sybaris mean?"

"I don't know who he is. That's what he calls himself—Sybaris. You see, we're Sybarites in our new world—that's what he says—"

Sybarite—one devoted to a life of bodily ease . . . Weird, mad adventure. A hundred escaped earth-criminals, with the stolen spaceship of Jean Lafayette; and with the medical apparatus of Dr. George Allaire. Yvette's father and uncle had doubtless been murdered—this boy Larry had heard mention of them—these scientific things which Sybaris and his men had stolen from them.

The criminals had gone into Space; had landed on a planetoid, which now was the comet, blazing in the northern sky as seen from earth. And on the comet they had established their new world. A life of bodily ease. To do nothing but enjoy themselves. How often in earth's own history fanatic cults have dreamed of establishing such a life! . . . And now a hundred girls had been abducted from earth. Two other trips, and this one . . . Mates for the Sybarites . . . To populate the new world . . . A little Empire for this mad, murderous adventurer . . .

Cometara, they had named their luminous little world. A planetoid of only a few hundred miles diameter, but with obviously so weirdly dense a core that gravity on it was almost that of earth. No other humans, or even pseudo-humans, were on it. Nothing but weird monsters . . .

AND then Larry's gruesome words chilled us. "Those monsters—" He seemed suddenly involuntarily to shudder. "Sybaris says they're bacteria—like earth-germs of disease—only big—big as a man—"

Bacteria . . . Ghastly huge things . . . As I listened to the boy's vague explanation, I wondered if here was something of science wholly new to man's understanding. A basic thing upon which mankind now had stumbled. This wandering little world, teeming with giant bacteria . . . A breeding place. One of the original sources of disease germs which on earth were the scourge of mankind. Giant things, like monstrous predatory animals . . . And their spawn perhaps in the form of sub-microscopic spores, drifting through space, landing upon the earth to become our sub-microscopic germ-life . . . Our disease germs—myriad in kind and character—thriving upon earth only in tiny, microscopic size

. . . But on the comet, in their original environment, monsters, gigantic . . .

Shuddering contemplation indeed . . . And then Larry was explaining the weird radiance which streamed from the bodies of all these bandits . . . Sybaris, he told us, was a scientific genius. He had invented an apparatus by which the human body could be impregnated with a radioactive substance—without harming its tissues, all alien organisms within it were killed. The bandits had made themselves immortal. Dr. George Allaire's apparatus, of course. And the criminals had found the antibacterite on the comet. They had treated their own bodies with it.

"And they're doing it to the girls too, right now, I guess," Larry was saying. "You get bathed in the N-ray light—Sybaris has the apparatus here on board. Only takes about an hour—you have to do it once a year."

"And that protects you from these monster germs?" Jimmy murmured.

"No, no it doesn't. How could it? It kills only the little ones that get into your body. The big ones—" He shuddered again. "Like animals—only my God, they seem to have as much intelligence maybe as a dog. We've got a barrage around our camp—N-ray barrage, Sybaris calls it. That keeps 'em off—they're afraid of it."

Little planetoid, the breeding place of bacteria. And on it, stores of the antibacterite were to be found. Balancing forces of nature. And then another aweing idea struck at me. The radiance that streams from a comet undoubtedly was the luminous, antibacterite radiance. I recalled the news report—that physicist who had seen a lurking ghost at his garden gate. He had seen one of these weirdly luminous bandits, of course—and the luminosity was the same as the comet's tail . . . Cometara, losing its antibacterite, so that the germ-monsters on it were growing stronger . . .

"Yes, I guess that's true," Larry agreed when I asked him. "Sybaris says things are getting worse in our world—we have to use a stronger barrage all the time—the damn Bacteris get so bold—"

Then, with voice still more furtive, he was telling us that he wanted to escape—get back to earth, give himself up to the authorities and serve out his prison term. He was only a boy; Sybaris and his men quite evidently kicked him around . . . And now, these abducted girls . . . Larry had seen Yvette . . .

"I—I wish I could help you get her out of here," he murmured. "She's so beautiful—so decent and sweet looking—"

Jimmy gripped him. "You're swell, Larry. We'll find a way—"

In the sudden silence abruptly I heard a sound out in the corridor beyond our door-slide. We all three listened. It came again—a scratching on our door; gruesome; insistent, like a dog scratching to get in!

CHAPTER IV

Sybaris—Man of Destiny

FOR an instant we were all stricken. Within me was a vague feeling of startled horror, like a premonition. Then Larry jumped to his feet.

"Why—why, Good Lord," he gasped. "That—I've heard things like that before. But — here on board — how could—"

Ghastly sounds. With the scratching now there came a gruesome, gibbering, mumbling cry. It was chilling, blood-curdling. I saw Larry taking a step forward; his figure in the dimness of the cubby glowed like a slim, pallid

ghost. Then abruptly beyond our door, the scratching and the blood-curdling cry had ceased. There was a scuttling, dragging step, fading in a second or two into soundlessness.

"Well—" murmured Jimmy. "Well, my God—"

"Something—here on board," Larry stammered. "But how could it? I thought so, once before — but we searched—"

"What's that?" I interrupted. "Listen—"

Had we imagined the gruesome sounds? There were other sounds in the corridor now — a distant human voice, and the tramp of oncoming footsteps. Then our door-panel slid aside. The big bulky Durkin loomed in the door-oval, with the radiance of the corridor behind him.

"Sybaris wants to see them," he said to Larry. His evil, flat-nosed face was grinning. "Bring 'em in."

Larry flashed us a glance of warning. And as he and Durkin shoved us through the doorway, Larry managed to whisper to me:

"Don't start anything! Be docile—do what he tells you."

"Yes, of course."

We were shoved by the leering Durkin along the corridor, into the dim control turret. It was faintly pallid with starlight that filtered through latticed, alumite window blinds. A single shining figure was in the round turret room. It was at the controls, and as we entered, it locked them and stood up.

Sybaris! Arch criminal of these Interplanetary bandits! In the dimness I blinked as I stood and stared at him, with Jimmy ranged beside me. Master Mind of these abductors of girls—these murderers. All I could see at first was a tall, slim, shining figure. The pearly, green, white and bluish radiance streamed from him, gathered about him like an enveloping aura. Then I could see the outlines of his body. He was clad in flexible metal garments. Shining knight — like Lohengrin he stood erect, dignified, commanding.

"You may sit down," he said. His voice was soft, with an ironic purr to it. Jimmy and I sat on a little metal bench which stood here against the wall. Sybaris nodded. And then he added, "You, Durkin—you Larry, leave us alone."

THERE was no purr in his voice as he issued the command. Instead, there was a faint rasp—an edge like steel. This gentle, shining fellow, I knew him then for what he was—cruel, murderous. A man of destiny? It seemed to radiate from him. I could feel it as I sat here staring at him; a sense of power, so that suddenly, with my mind on Yvette, trapped, a prisoner here, I was shuddering.

On his head Sybaris was wearing a white metal helmet, with a great winged insignia over his forehead. He took it off now, and as he sat in the control seat, swung around to front us, a little ray of starlight through the window lattice struck on his face. It was smooth-shaven. A handsome face of pallid, handsome features, wholly intellectual. He seemed a man of perhaps thirty-five. His nose was thin, high-bridged; his eyes dark, glittering. A profusion of coal-black hair was tousled on his forehead and hung low about his ears.

He was smiling at us now—a smile of irony as though his thoughts amused him.

"I am Sybaris," he said gently. "Your Master. You understand that?"

"Yes," I murmured.

His smile widened. "Sybaris — the name I have taken. I had another one once, of course, but we will forget that. Master of the Sybarites. A New Era, Dean—our little Empire on Cometara.

Sybarites—worshippers of a life of bodily ease. That sounds alluring?" He chuckled. "It is alluring, my friends."

A madman? I knew he was not that. He seemed to be amusing himself, toying with us.

"What have you done with Yvette Allaire?" Jimmy blurted out. "What the devil does all this mean? Damn you—answer me!"

Sybaris raised his thin black eyebrows. "So the little fellow would like to fight? How silly." And then the steel-edge leaped into his suave, polished voice. "I hoped you wouldn't have to learn from experience — that you would have the sense to take warning."

I hardly saw his slender hand as it flicked to his belt. A little silver wire leaped out, which he gripped by its handle. All in a second. Sybaris swished the wire. It lashed out, struck with a welt across Jimmy's face; and in the same second was coiled back into Sybaris' belt. And still the shining villain was quietly smiling.

Jimmy might have leaped to the attack. But I gripped him. "Easy," I muttered. "Stop that!"

"So the big one has more sense," Sybaris said gently. "That is good. Now we understand each other. What am I going to do with you two? That's what you're wondering?"

"Yes," I agreed. "That's natural, isn't it?"

"Quite. Let me tell you of our little Empire. We are not many. Only a hundred or so of us men. But we are planning to build a civilization which will be the envy of the Universe. Life of pleasure. Life of ease. No struggle. None of the damnable frailties of human existence. All that we have banished. Only a hundred of us, but now we are going to have wives, and children so that we will grow and spread over our little world. The ideal existence! What is mankind's destiny—his greatest longing? The pursuit of human happiness! Isn't that so? Well, I have found the way to accomplish it."

WAS he jibing at us? Jibing, in his heart, at all these fatuous villains which he had gathered around him? Somehow, it did not seem so. His eyes were gleaming now with the inner fire of his emotions.

"Well—" I murmured. "That sounds—"

"The perfection of human existence," he interrupted. "A hundred families on Cometara—that we shall have now. And in a generation, with the science we have mastered, who shall say what we may do? Conquer the Earth? Show them our way of living—so much better than their own futile struggles!"

"Well," I said. "And so you want us to join you? Want us to—"

Irony leaped again upon his face, and he chuckled. "Do you think I am so stupid? You did not join me willingly. I brought you here. Your destiny?" His eyes were suddenly narrowed, even though his thin lips still were smiling. "You are to be our first slaves. Robert and James Dean—the first slaves of the New Era. We need you—because even though our little world is ideal, still there is some work to do."

Then suddenly he stood up; his hand on the control table pressed a buzzer. Behind us, Durkin appeared.

"Take them back," he said. "There is no work for them now. We will train them later."

"Yes, Master," Durkin grinned. "Come on, you two."

I think I need no more than sketch those following three days as the little spaceship approached the flaming Comet—weird little world which was to be our home, our New Era. In the cubby of the shining corridor, Jimmy

and I were for a time kept imprisoned. Durkin brought us food and drink; and sometimes Larry came. Then presently we were allowed to move more freely about the ship, since certainly we had no chance of escaping from it. We could not see the imprisoned girls. Sometimes their voices were audible—frightened, murmuring voices from behind two or three of the corridor doors.

Much of our time was spent, after the first day, in the control turret where usually Sybaris sat at the ship's levers and instrument dials. I had tried, and Jimmy tried also, to convince these villains that we had no desire to escape; that the life they pictured was very much to our liking. Some of them may have believed it, but Sybaris certainly did not. He regarded us always with that suave ironic smile.

Sybarites! A life of pleasure and nothing else! A New Era, where humans would live without strife? But Jimmy and I were to be slaves. Certainly we would cause trouble, if we could. The bandits here on the ship—there seemed about twenty of them, this voyage; all of them rough, uncouth fellows of which the giant Durkin was a fair sample—were roistering now as our voyage neared its end. Their supply of alcoholite seemed unlimited. They were looking forward to the choosing of their wives the night we landed. Some of the girls they had already seen, so that they were hoping to be given the one whose looks they fancied most.

A world without strife? The irony of it struck at me. Larry and Jimmy were planning something now. Just two young lads, still in their 'teens. But both of them—and myself too—were capable of any murderous deed if only we could escape with Yvette, get her safely back to Earth.

AND the burly, flat-nosed Durkin? Larry whispered to me once: "Sybaris is a fool to trust that fellow. He's up to something—damned if I know what." And then he added words that turned me cold with a shudder: "Durkin talks a lot about Yvette Allaire. He evidently likes her looks. There'll be trouble tonight at that marriage dance."

We were close to the Comet now. Steadily, in advance of our bow, it had enlarged so that now it was a round, putty-colored ball, with a great luminous haze streaming out from it like a cloak, and the Comet's tail a vast shining crescent like a Titan's sword spread across half the sky.

And then we were dropping down upon a dark convex surface—a wild naked landscape of tumbled metal mountains. There seemed little or no atmosphere; no water, no soil, no vegetation. Barren as a Lunar landscape. Empty of all life. Then we were hovering over a monstrous yawning pit—a vast crater, nearly circular, a hundred miles or more in width. Slowly we descended into it. Down to the level of the little planetoid's metal surface. And then lower—down into subterranean regions . . .

Jimmy and I were in the turret, with Larry beside us. Sybaris was at the controls. The turret was darker now than it had ever been before. Beside me, Larry's body was glowing like a spectre. In the control chair, Sybaris was a slim, shining wraith. And then, with sudden impulse, he reached, pressed a buzzer. A woman came in answer. I had seen her several times before—a big, raw-boned, slatternly-looking woman of about thirty. Her name was Jahna. She was, I understood, Durkin's wife—the only woman who had come, originally, with the criminals upon their weird adventure into Space.

"Jahna, bring me that girl—that Yvette Allaire," Sybaris said.

My heart leaped. Beside me, Jimmy

stirred with a muttered oath. But Larry's hand warned us; and he whispered, "Only bring harm to her, and death to you, if you try anything."

Then presently, into the almost dark turret-room, Yvette came. Yvette, unharmed; terrified, obviously, but unharmed. My heart pounded at sight of her, and I heard Jimmy suck in his breath with awed amazement as we stared. Yvette had already been bathed in the weird rays of the antibacterite. A girl, invulnerable now to human disease; invulnerable to the ravages of old age.

I stared at her shining figure—that weird luminous glow streaming from her slim body. And it made her seem a creature ethereal—a shining little Goddess, with a beauty unnatural, unearthly. The aura of her own glow struck upon her face. There was a sheen upon her beautiful features of soft iridescence. Weirdly beautiful—unearthly. And that queerly struck a pang through me. It was as though my Yvette now had been raised into something so far beyond me—something as though in truth she were a Goddess—that now forever she was unattainable to me.

It was just a weird, subconscious feeling as I stared at her amazing, glowing beauty. And then the factual reality came again into my mind. This was merely prosaic science. New to me, and weird, but that was all. And I could see the terror on little Yvette's face, and in her hesitant walk as the woman Jahna shoved her forward.

SYBARIS was on his feet now, staring, like us all, amazed at Yvette's beauty. She was still clad in her Earth-costume of tight silk corded trousers and white silk blouse; and her dark hair was braided and coiled upon her head.

For an instant Sybaris stared. And then he murmured, "Why—little Goddess, truly you are more amazing than I had thought. Come, sit by me." The light of his own sheen was on his smiling face; it mingled with the glitter from his dark eyes as he gazed at Yvette.

And she was staring at him; and suddenly she gasped, "You, Thomas Tarl—you?"

It evidently did not surprise him; he had expected her recognition. Thomas Tarl. Her father's assistant, who had worked with him, and with her uncle.

"Thomas Tarl?" he echoed. "Quite so. But that name is forgotten here. I am Sybaris—you will call me that." Gently he reached and drew her to a little taboret beside him. I was holding my breath, with every instinct to call out to Yvette; but I knew that if I did, Sybaris would send us from the turret.

"You used to be afraid of me," he was murmuring. "Don't be like that now, Yvette. Sybaris would be the last in the Universe to hurt you."

"Where—where is my father?" she stammered. "And my uncle—"

"Unfortunately, they died," Sybaris said smoothly. "I am so sorry about that, Yvette—"

"You killed them?" she gasped. "You—you Tarl—"

"And if I did," he smiled, "you would know that it was necessary. Perhaps the fate of the happiness of all mankind depends upon me. Don't you see? This new way of life. You are joining it now, little Yvette. And you will like it—and like me—Oh yes, you will. Because I have great plans for—us. For you and me—little Goddess—"

A sudden cry out in the corridor checked him. A man's shout of horror and fear. Then another; and the woman Jahna, screaming.

Sybaris leaped to his feet. "What in the devil—" he muttered.

Abruptly now the sound of a scut-

tling, scratching was audible! Something coming toward the control room door. The thing that had scratched on our cubby door, trying to get in.

Ghastly stowaway! Its blood-curdling voice sounded as it came along the corridor with scratching tread. And then it burst into the cubby—monstrous red-glowing thing. A round, jelly-like crimson blob, huge as a man, with luminous crimson tentacles waving.

Monstrous disease-germ! The myriad little points of its central cluster of eyes were glaring balefully as for a second it poised on the turret threshold.

And then it plunged at us!

CHAPTER V

The Fight with the Giant Germ

THE control turret was in chaos. I was aware that I had leaped so that as the ghastly crimson monster scuttled forward, I was between it and Yvette. Horrible, noisome thing. It glowed, luminous in the semi-darkness here, with its red radiance. I could see its pulpy, slimy flesh quivering, palpitating.

And then I collided with it! Chaos of horror. The pulsating tentacles, like the arms of an octopus, went around me, pinning me with their convulsive strength. Slimy, one-celled animal substance, wrapping itself around me so that I staggered on my feet as it twitched to squeeze me. Its group of eyes, close to my face, glared red with a wild menace. From somewhere within its twitching bulk, the thing was screaming now—blood-curdling, eerie cry, as though it were a monster maniac, gloating over this struggling victim.

In that tumultuous second I was aware only that I was wildly struggling, with flailing hands gripping the crimson tentacles. Noisome, horrible. The pulpy, stenching, sticky stuff broke apart within my grip, so that I flung segments of it away. But it seemed to heal as I broke it—viscous, like sticky rubber, flowing together to form a new arm, again gripping me.

Then I was aware that Jimmy was beside me. Both of us fighting to keep our feet. In another second I felt him go down, but I lifted him up. Then a crimson arm, with giant strength, raised me into the air. I lunged. The tentacle-arm quivered and broke with my weight so that I fell backward, with the pulpy mass of the arm squashed on the floor under me.

Yvette was screaming in terror. At the doorway vaguely I saw half a dozen of the bandits, afraid to enter. Then I was aware that Larry was pulling at Jimmy, trying to drag him free. On the floor I rose to my feet, staggering. The monster bacteris had retreated now against one of the walls. It seemed to crouch, huddled, shrinking its torn, oozing mass of primitive flesh into a smaller compact bulk. Its horrible voice was gibbering; its red eyes wildly glared. For a second it poised, gathering itself for a new assault.

And now I heard the voice of Sybaris: "Keep away, you fools! I will handle it."

I staggered back, panting, staring; and with Yvette beside me I flung an arm around her.

"Oh Bob," she murmured. "Oh dear God—look at it—"

The ghastly thing was quivering like a great mound of blood-red jelly, with tongues of crimson radiance almost like fire rising from it. And now Sybaris was confronting it. I saw his hand go to his belt; then he was holding a little projector-grid.

"The N-ray!" Larry gasped. "Thank Heaven he has one!"

The great quivering germ was advancing now. I drew Yvette sidewise;

Larry and Jimmy scattered. For a second, Sybaris stood motionless. And then his projector hissed. A pallid stream of luminous phosphorescence streamed from it. Effulgence of the Comet's tail! The antibacterite! It streamed out fan-shaped from Sybaris' tiny muzzle, so that the monster was bathed in a circle of pallid light.

I gasped. For that second the hideous, giant germ was checked in its forward rush. It stopped; with tentacles lashing, it stood screaming. And then it was melting! Monstrous, crimsoned jelly, before our eyes turning into loathsome, liquid putrescence! Another second or two. Melting; lumping into a shrinking, shapeless mass. The turret floor was running red now—red with sticky, half-coagulated ooze, with luminescence streaming up from it like crimson steam.

AND then the monster had completely melted. There was only the sluggish-flowing, stenching ooze on the floor to mark where it had been.

Sybaris relaxed. A slow smile was on his thin lips. "You see, little Yvette?" he murmured. "There is no danger when you are with Sybaris." Then he raised his voice. "You men, out there—come in now. Clean up this mess."

I sat beside Yvette, still with horror flooding me. How the damnable thing ever got on board the spaceship was never revealed. But I thought of that only a moment, with my mind flinging ahead to this weird little world upon which we so soon were to land . . . These giant bacteria, its only inhabitants, until now humans had dared come . . .

We were far down within the cone of the huge dead volcano now—the spaceship, slowly dropping into solid, blank darkness. How far down had we gone? A thousand feet below the little planetoid's surface? Easily that. And then another thousand, and another . . .

Thomas Tarl was still at the controls. Sybaris. I could not now think of him by that fantastic name he had given himself. Tarl, who had been Yvette's father's trusted assistant. Murderer of her father, and her uncle. A scientific genius, of course. A madman, with a dream of a New Era. A new little Empire which he was ruling. And he could envisage himself, in time, master of the great Earth—perhaps Master of the Universe. Thomas Tarl, man of destiny . . .

He had the shuddering Yvette seated beside him now. He had raised the lattice-shades of the control turret bulls-eye windows. Beyond the thick, glassite panes there was only blank darkness as we slowly sank into the subterranean depths. Blank darkness? I saw presently that there was a faint pallid glow outside. The same streaming opalescent radiance of the antibacterite. It was inherent to the rocks here, streaming out so that now the darkness was illumined into a faint pallid twilight. It made me contemplate the amazing adjustments which nature makes, unquestionably through all the universe. This little world, with ghastly bacteria swarming it, was the storehouse perhaps of all the disease germs which ever had floated in the form of life-spores, to Earth. And this storehouse, if left unchecked, might in time germinate enough to depopulate the Earth. Enough to contaminate all the planets of the Solar System.

And so all-wise nature, to retain the balance between good and evil, had made the antibacterite radiance inherent to this little world, so that its monstrous inhabitants would be held in check . . .

"Almost there," Larry was murmuring, at my elbow. "Dean, listen—a few hours after we get there, they'll hold the marriage dance. The choosing of

wives. I'll see if I can arrange it—you and Jimmy, you'll be imprisoned somewhere—in Sybaris' house, I guess. I'll try and get to you. I've got a plan—if only we can get hold of Yvette—"

He checked himself suddenly as one of the bandits approached us. And with Jimmy, silently I sat staring out of the window-bullseye—staring at the luminous haze outside. Steadily it was clarifying. I could see that we were slowly dropping down, close beside one of the almost vertical cliff-walls of the giant crater. Then the wall abruptly was gone as we passed what seemed the edge of a giant ceiling.

A VAST luminous grotto was beside us now—a great blurred haze of opal twilight, so vast that it was almost like being outdoors. We were descending ever more slowly; and now we had shifted sidewise until we were in the grotto. Then I saw its shining floor coming up to meet us. It was a great undulating spread of glowing rocks. But there seemed a little soil here now. Air, breathable to humans, had collected down here in what I later learned was a vast sytem of tunnels, caves and grottos some ten thousand feet beneath the surface of the little world. Soil here. And I saw a few ribbons of shining water; and off in the great luminous distance, there were hills which seemed to have trees on them.

The world of Cometara. We landed presently on a level rock-space.

"Take them," Tarl said suddenly. "You, Durkin—take the two slaves—that room in my home—and have your woman care for them."

"Yvette—" I murmured. But instantly Tarl swung upon me. "Slaves need say nothing," he rasped, "unless they are questioned. You understand that, I'm sure."

I yielded. My glance warned Jimmy. Larry flung us a mute, significant gaze. There was a little murmured protest from the terrified Yvette. Then the grinning giant Durkin gripped us and shoved us from the turret. In the corridor I could hear the frightened voices of the girl prisoners as the woman Jahna made them ready to disembark.

The world of Cometara. A motley group of the bandits were outside now on the rocks to greet us. I saw the long line of girls being herded down another incline—little glowing huddled figures, like ghosts in the shining pallid twilight. The phantom-like figures of the men out there lunged at them with shouts of joy; but the men guarding them shoved their fellows back.

"Not yet!" they cried. "Not 'till tonight—two hours now—"

"The marriage dance—tonight—tonight—" The half-drunken roistering voices shouted it with glee, as they followed the girls, appraising them.

Durkin was shoving us now, impatiently. I saw the luminous figure of Tarl, slim, erect with his huge winged helmet on his head—commanding figure, the Master here, returning to his little world with the living booty of his latest voyage. And the shining little figure of Yvette was beside him, with his arm around her. Some of the men lunged forward with admiration, but Tarl's gesture waved them away.

There was an instant when I saw that Durkin was staring after Yvette—this flat-nosed, villainous giant, staring with so odd an expression on his face that I caught my breath. Then again he was shoving at Jimmy and me, herding us forward into the eerie darkness. There seemed a dozen interlacing corridor passages here. Durkin guided us into one of them. It was a winding trip of perhaps a quarter of a mile; and then again we were in a great open grotto. Its ceiling was so high that I could not see it; there was just a blur of the opalescent haze, like a night sky overhead.

TARL'S encampment. It lay here, spread before us. I had only a brief glimpse. The glowing ground undulated off seemingly for miles into open distance. To one side, in the pallid haze, there was what seemed a natural amphitheatre of rocks. A great platform had been built there. To the other side was a little village—a straggling group of perhaps a hundred houses. The homes which these outlaws had built in their little alien world. Homes to which now their wives were being brought. Tarl's encampment. The nucleus of his New Era. The world of the Sybarites. Utopia . . . I stared at it blankly. The little houses were set in groups, with a vague semblance of winding streets between them. Motley little dwellings, crudely built of wood and stone and metal. They were of every form and size—constructed quite evidently from the pilfered segments of Earth-buildings which had been brought here. One, near at hand, was larger. Tarl's home; and beside it a shed-like affair which was his scientific laboratory.

Utopia. World without work. How impossible that really is! These humans had to eat. They had to have clothing. Much of the food and clothing was pilfered from Earth, of course, upon the several voyages which the bandit spaceship had made. But beyond the village I could see a field of soil, where evidently food was being grown. Work for some of these adventurers. Work—so incompatible with Utopia that undoubtedly those who had to do it were sullen, rebellious . . .

And beyond the village, beyond the amphitheatre, I could see a faint, pallid, blue-white haze like a curtain rising from the ground—vertical barrage-curtain streaming up into the twilight sky, shutting off the distances beyond it. But still I could faintly see what was beyond. Things that huddled out there. Millions upon millions of little luminous blobs. They milled one upon the other. Crimson, green, and yellow things—staring through the barrage-curtain—staring at these alien humans who had come here . . . Myriad bacterites, held in check by the barrage.

"Here we are," Durkin said. "In with you."

We went through a doorway, along a little stone corridor, and were shoved into a room—a small room, motley with furnishings which had been stolen from Earth. Durkin in a moment left us, locking the door after him. The room was windowless. Outside it we could hear the shouts of the bandits as they made things ready for the evening ceremony—this ceremony of multiple marriage for which so long they had been waiting.

By the living routine of the little village now, it was now evidently about the evening mealtime. There were two other doors to our prison-room. Cautiously Jimmy and I inspected them. The first was unlocked. It led to a dim corridor. A guard was out there, at a distant door to some other apartment. And instantly he gestured to send us back.

Our other door in a moment opened. The big slatternly Jahna came in with food. We could see that that other door led to a sort of kitchen. One of Tarl's men was there, eating at a table. But his gaze was toward us; and on the table his flash-weapon was lying in readiness.

"No use," Jimmy murmured.

The woman Jahna heard him. She flung us a sour look. "If you try anything queer," she murmured, "you'll be killed. And then we won't have any slaves." Suddenly she was laughing. "Slaves!" she reiterated. "There's a damn joke. I'm a slave. Every woman who's brought here—she'll be a slave too."

SILENTLY Jimmy and I ate our meal, with the woman sullenly serving us. Both of us were tense inside. How could we get out of here? What difference would it make if we did? Where was Yvette?

"Larry said he'd try and get here to us," Jimmy whispered once. "I wish to the devil he'd come."

Jimmy had now told me Larry's plan for us. In these lighted rooms the villains' aura of the antibacterite in which their bodies had been bathed, was hardly noticeable; but outdoors in the twilight darkness, they were luminous as phantoms. But Jimmy and I—our bodies had no such radiating aura. Larry was hoping to get us out of here. In the confusion, the excitement of the impending marriage ceremony outside, our dark bodies would not be noticed. And Larry hoped to be able to release Yvette, wrap her in a dark cloak. Then in the darkness he would guide us back to the spaceship . . .

Futile plans . . . But we could do nothing, it seemed, except rely upon them; hope for their success . . . But where was Larry now?

Jahna—an hour or so after we had eaten—still was in the adjoining apartment. And suddenly Jimmy and I were stricken by the sound of Yvette's voice! It floated dimly in to us through the doorway that led into the stone corridor. Yvette's voice, seemingly frightened.

"She's there in that other room," Jimmy murmured. "If only we could get at that guard—"

Then we saw that momentarily the guard had gone from the corridor. Our chance. Cautiously we went its fifty foot length. The door at its other end was ajar. We crouched there . . .

"Your costume, little Goddess." It was Tarl's soft, purring voice. "Your costume for the ceremony. White for purity—do you like it?"

"Why—why yes, it's very pretty," Yvette murmured.

We could see into the room; a small draped apartment, like a little boudoir. Tarl was there, still clad in his garments of silver flexible metal. Yvette was seated on a chair; and he was holding before her a costume of flowing white drapery. Yvette, with terror on her beautiful little face; but she was trying to smile, trying not to show her fear.

I think, in that second, that the crouching Jimmy and I might have leaped upon Tarl. He was armed, but I thought that we might take him by surprise. We were tensed to spring through the doorway. Then abruptly I checked us. Within the room, one of the big exotic wall-drapes was moving! It was behind Yvette and Tarl, so that they did not see it. The drape moved; a thick hand and hairy arm was visible. The hand held a naked knife, with its steel blade glittering in the room's bluish tubelight. And then the drape moved further.

Durkin! Slowly, silently he emerged from his hiding place. His flat-nosed, heavy face was grim; contorted with hatred. Half drunk, he staggered from behind the portiere, lurching with murderous fury at Tarl!

CHAPTER VI

Revolt of the Sybarites

IN that second Jimmy and I were stricken, watching from the doorway. Then it seemed that Yvette saw Durkin. She gave a gasping, startled scream. Tarl saw his danger. He whirled, leaped aside like a cat, so quick and unexpected a movement that the lurching Durkin went past him, trying to turn.

Then the grim, white-faced Tarl was standing drawn to his full height, with

his slow smile playing on his thin lips. His jeweled white hand flicked to his belt. He hardly drew the weapon when its tiny bolt stabbed with unerring aim. Durkin was staggering clumsily forward; and the pencilray of bolt clicked against his upheld knife-blade. There was a tiny shower of sparks and then the blade was hurled away. It clattered to the floor.

All in certainly no more than two or three seconds. Durkin was confused. With a roar of rage, he spun again, lurched for Tarl. But he was like a bull, trying to rush a contemptuous Matador. Again, with incredible alertness, Tarl jumped aside. Little lightnings were darting from his eyes now. Again his hand went to his belt. The thin, coiled white wire leaped out—that wire with which he had struck Jimmy on the space ship. As Tarl gripped its tiny handle, it whizzed through the air.

Durkin screamed with pain as it lashed across his face. But he kept on. Then Tarl had pounced again. From another angle, his wire lashed. Again . . . Again . . . And now I could see that the wire was glowing with a current in it . . . Red—then orange—then violet-hot. It sang with Tarl's blows; and hummed with its current. Its blows seared through Durkin's clothes now. Or again it struck naked upon his face. The giant went to his knees; and then he fell . . .

"That's enough!" he was screaming. "I give up—help—help me—"

But still there was only that faint amused smile on Tarl's handsome mouth—those little lightnings darting from his eyes—as from against the room-wall he stood, lashing his huge adversary with the violet-hot wire. Then Yvette was screaming her horrified protest.

"Oh—well, for you, my little Goddess," Tarl murmured suddenly. "If you think he has had enough—for now —I will stop—"

In the dim corridor Jimmy and I crouched stricken. There was a turmoil springing up now. Men were coming. I caught my wits. There was nothing that we could do here now which by any chance would enable us to rescue Yvette and escape to the spaceship. And if we were caught here in the corridor we might be punished; imprisoned somewhere else, or more closely guarded so that Larry would not be able to reach us.

"Get back," I whispered to Jimmy. "Back where we belong!"

Then I caught my breath; triumph leaped within me. One of Tarl's guards had come into the little room by another door. With his rush he had kicked the knife that Durkin had dropped. So much commotion was in there now that no one noticed. And the knife slid forward, across the floor and to the threshold of this other door at which we were crouching. I stooped; picked it up, and darted back through the dim corridor after Jimmy.

We reached the other room just in time. More of Tarl's men came running in. "Something wrong in there!" Jimmy gasped. "What the devil—somebody getting beaten!"

The guards rushed past us. All but one, who stood watching us. The commotion presently quieted. They had taken Durkin away, we were told; taken him to a house nearby, where he would be locked up and later, beaten again.

For another half hour or so Jimmy and I sat docile, waiting to see what would happen to us. Our guard stood midway in the corridor. His glowing body was a dim, luminous ghost. The other door, to Yvette's little room, was closed now. The door to the adjoining kitchen room was partly open. We could see the woman Jahna in there—Jahna with her face grim, contorted with fury

at what had been done to Durkin. Two burly men were with her. All three were whispering.

I WENT to the partly open door, and found I could hear fragments.

"I'll get him out," Jahna was saying. "By God, Tom — this is our chance. I'll get him out—"

"An' where'll he go?" one of the men demanded.

"He knows. Quite a ways — he'll hide safely. "An' you get the men together—the ones you can trust."

"Fifty maybe," the other man said. "This damn Sybaris with his slimy talk —you know what he'll do? Make us all work before we get through. All but him an' those few he's chosen. An' they'll get just the girls they want—an' we'll get what's left. I'm onto this crooked game."

"Right you are," Jahna agreed. "I always told you my Durkin would give you a square deal. You'd rather have him, wouldn't you? Better than this damn Sybaris?"

The New Era! Utopia! But here was rebellion—a little brewing revolution . . . Jimmy and I crept back to our seats at the other side of the room. If only Larry would come . . . But he didn't. We could still hear the voices outside—the men preparing for the marriage ceremony.

"We've got to do something," Jimmy murmured at last. "Listen—we've got a knife now—"

One knife between us. Of what use could that be?

"They're quiet there in the kitchen—wonder what's going on," I whispered. We went back to the other door. The kitchen momentarily seemed empty! The open door on its other side was a dim dark oval with the outer darkness behind it. Our chance! We had no plan. Only that we must do something to get out of here. But I remembered that Yvette's room had a little window. If we could get around the house, and get that window open—

We darted through the empty kitchen. And abruptly, at the open door, a bulky figure loomed! One of the guards. He saw us coming at him. The agile Jimmy jumped ahead of me, and like a little wildcat he flung himself on the burly guard, with a hand clapping over his mouth to startle his cry.

That guard didn't have a chance. He was trying to level his weapon when my knife sank into his ribs. He went backward and down, with Jimmy on top of him and his death-scream stifled by Jimmy's hand.

"Good enough!" Jimmy murmured. "Come on—let's get away from here."

He rose up from our prostrate adversary, and we darted off. It was dark out here—that faint, glowing dimness. Over at the amphitheatre there were a few artificial lights. A group of men were working there. Pallid group of phantoms. I was thankful now that Jimmy and I had not been bathed in the antibacterite. In the darkness here we were mere shadows, unnoticed among the glowing, ghostly figures.

"Around the building," I whispered. "Remember that window of Yvette's room?"

We reached it. The faint pallid tube-light was glowing from inside. The lower window sash was partly up. And Yvette was gone! The little filmy white costume was lying on the floor. Where had she gone? We stood blankly staring. Had Tarl taken her somewhere? How could we find her?

Then suddenly there was a distant commotion! Men shouting. At a building about a hundred feet away, luminous figures were gathering. Then we heard Tarl's voice off there—Tarl shouting his condemnation of a guard who had been placed there.

THEY had just discovered that Durkin was gone! The woman Jahna undoubtedly had been able to release him. Durkin gone! Escaped felon, here in this little Utopia! The men were raging at his escape. Outwardly indignant; but I wondered how many of them were secretly pleased? Gathering now on the eve of the marriage-dance; whispering together. Planning how Tarl and his loyal men might be killed, and Durkin recalled from his distant, secret hiding place to be their leader!

"Listen," Jimmy was whispering. "Do you suppose by any chance that Larry got Yvette out of that window? Maybe they got to the spaceship?"

Could we find our way there now? It wasn't far; vaguely I remembered the winding corridor-tunnels. The little cliff through which we had come was here close at hand—rock-cliff shining with a pallid eerie glow in the darkness. Should we try getting to the spaceship?

We had no time to decide such questions. We had started for the cliff; just darting shadows. No one noticed us—the commotion was all at the shed-like building from which Durkin had escaped. We were almost at a tunnel-entrance when suddenly I saw a luminous blob on the ground. A faint groan came from it.

Yvette? Dear God— The instinctive thought stabbed at me. But it wasn't Yvette. It was the woman Jahna —Durkin's woman, lying here dying, with her throat a crimson welter!

CHAPTER VII

The Cave of Light

WE bent over her. She was obviously almost gone; faintly gasping, with a sickening bloody foam at her pallid lips. Her glazing eyes recognized me. She faintly murmured,

"He—he did for me. Damn him—Oh, damn him—"

"Who did?" I said. "Tell us, Jahna. And have you seen that girl, Yvette Allaire? Where is she?"

I held my breath, hanging upon her answer. Her hand was trying to come up from the ground with a gesture. "He—your friend there—you ask him. He—got it too, but I don't think he's dead."

Jimmy suddenly gasped, "Bob—look! Over there—another one!"

There was another victim, lying here crumpled on the rocks; another broken, glowing body, like a stricken ghost in the darkness. We rushed to it. Larry! He was lying here. Not dead but seemingly just recovering consciousness. As I stooped, I saw that blood was matting his hair—a ragged scalp wound where something had hit him.

"You—" he murmured. "Why—why, I guess I'm all right now. He—he killed Jahna—"

Then he was up on one elbow, with his strength coming back so that he was able to tell us what had happened . . . He had tried to get us half an hour ago. But the opportunity he had wanted seemed not to come, so that he had decided to watch his chance and try and release Yvette Allaire first; and then come to us. He was sure that tonight, with all this excitement of the choosing of the girls, the spaceship would be deserted. He would hide Yvette Allaire there.

From outside the window of that little room in which Yvette Allaire had been placed, he had watched her in there. For a time, Tarl was with her. The lashed Durkin had been taken away. Tarl again was showing Yvette her costume for the ceremony. Then he had bid her to put it on; and had left her.

LARRY had taken her out through the window. With her glowing little body wrapped in a dark cloak, he had started to lead her to this tunnel which led to the spaceship. And suddenly, from the shadow of a rock, two figures rose up. Durkin! The burly giant in desperate frenzy, lunged at Larry; caught him by surprise; crashed a rock on his head.

With his senses reeling, Larry went down. He almost lost consciousness, but not quite. Dimly he was aware of Durkin seizing Yvette . . .

"Well, what luck!" he heard the giant chuckling. "My little Earth-beauty—just the one I want! You can go with me now into exile! But we'll come back, little one. Sure we will. Come back tomorrow, after my men are organized and that damn Sybaris is killed. Then you and I will be the bosses here. I'll marry you—make you the head woman in this place. How do you like that, eh?"

Dimly Larry knew that Yvette was futilely struggling with him. And then suddenly the other figure which had been here with Durkin, jumped forward. It was Jahna. Outraged woman—wildly jealous now of Yvette, so that she leaped to tear Yvette from Durkin. And then the burly giant had turned his wrath upon her—stabbed her and slashed her throat . . .

"That—that's about all I can remember," Larry was murmuring to us now. "Durkin ran, pulling Yvette with him. And then he picked her up and was carrying her . . . I guess I fainted—lying here—that's all I remember."

But his strength was coming back now. In a moment he was staggering to his feet. We went back to the woman Jahna. She was still alive.

"Your Durkin," I murmured. "He took that girl with him. Where did they go? Don't you know, Jahna?"

"The—the Cave of Light," she faintly gasped. "He—damn him—to want that girl—"

"I know where the Cave of Light is," Larry muttered. "If he took her there—"

"To want that girl—" A torrent of blood choked the dying Jahna. "I always loved him—and he wanted that girl—because she is beautiful—" She was still trying to gasp it. Pitiful woman, disillusioned.

"He wanted that girl, more than me." She was murmuring it, over and over, until in a moment her breath suddenly stopped, the light went out of her eyes and she was gone.

Jimmy and I stood with Larry. I was in an agony of apprehension that his glowing shape might be discovered here. But so far, there had been no alarm. Back by the nearest group of houses, we could still hear the excited voices of the bandits who had discovered that Durkin was gone.

I gripped Larry. "The Cave of Light? Do you think Durkin would go there?"

"Yes. I guess so. A good hideout. The—the bacteris can't get at you in the Cave of Light. They're afraid of it—"

"You know where it is?"

"Yes. Yes, I do. Come on—I'll take you. It's not so far—"

Jimmy and I turned, plunged after him into a nearby tunnel mouth . . . Weird journey. I suppose it was some five miles, down to a lower level and back into the honeycombed subterranean region of the little Comet . . .

GHASTLY journey. We pressed on, breathless. The dim, faintly glowing little tunnel passage presently opened into a long narrow grotto. And suddenly I was aware of the lurking things that were watching us. We passed a recess that seemed to wind back into darkness. But I could see

things milling in there. Little green slimy things like footballs with waving feelers on them. Bouncing footballs the size of a man's head. A million of them, crowded in there, leaping one upon the other in a pulsating mass.

Monstrous germs of some dread disease. They saw us as we passed and a million little blood-curdling cries went up. And then they were bouncing out; thousands of them in tumbling, milling groups, trying to bar our passage!

We stood stricken. "Good Lord," Jimmy murmured. "Why—why these damn things—"

And then they were rushing, bouncing to engulf us. "Easy!" Larry muttered. "Don't get rattled. Stand still!"

A small alumite cylinder was in his hand. The N-ray projector. He pressed its lever, and the violet pencil-ray of antibacterite sprang in a glowing beam. It cut through the gruesome, milling, screaming germs. Melted them into streams of semi-liquid, green-glowing putrescence, with their little voices horribly screaming.

"Come on!" Larry urged. "Our chance now."

Through the horrible putrescence we waded forward; got free and ran . . . At times there was empty darkness. Then again we came to colonies of the ghastly things. We passed one great open space where the glowing pallid-silver antibacterite inherent to the rocks seemed of much less than normal intensity. A vast mixed colony of the germs had collected here . . .

Amazing, terrible sight. For what seemed miles of distance, the myriad swarms were milling. Their own glowing radiance—lurid green, orange, turgid brown, and crimson, red as new blood—illumined the ghastly scene. A million million of the little green footballs. And beside them, milling and trying to leap over them, another colony—slimy pulsating rods of red, jelly-like ooze. Rods thick as a man's body, and twice as long. They screamed with gibbering cries as like giant gruesome snakes they slithered to get at us . . .

Horrible bacteria, terrifying now in their giant size . . . And there were monsters here. A swarm of giant blobs, huge as elephants—round pulpy bodies of crimson jelly with great waving tentacles—lunged at us. Larry's N-ray stabbed into them; cut like fire through them; hurled them back.

"Hurry! Hurry!" he gasped. "This N-ray—almost de-charged now—"

We lunged forward, trying to reach a little lighter area in a tunnel opening before us—glowing rocks in there which the monsters were avoiding. And suddenly I saw that Larry was staggering. He stumbled; seemed almost to fall so that Jimmy and I gripped him, supporting him as we dashed forward. And then we reached the faintly glowing tunnel. Momentarily the swarm of screaming things was behind us.

"What's the matter?" I gasped. "Larry, what's happened to you?"

HIS face was bloodless, contorted with pain. But still he was trying to smile. "That—that Durkin," he murmured. "Hit me on the head and then—stabbed me."

He drew aside his ragged, tattered coat. His shirt was stained with blood. We had to support him as we pressed on through the tunnel.

"How much further, Larry?"

"Not far—now. This curving tunnel—you'll see—"

The narrow tunnel was ascending. We went around a bend. A glow of silver shining light was ahead. Then we topped a little rise. And for a moment crouched breathless, staring.

The Cave of Light! It was some fifteen feet below us—a fifty foot circular grotto, with a vaulted ceiling close

overhead. Amazing, blue-white fairyland of beauty! Masses of rock formation hung down like glittering, glowing stalactites. Like opalescent icicles, gleaming with silver-blue phosphorescence. From the floor, great columns of stalagmites projected up. All glowing with the blue-white light. It was a concentration of antibacterite here—luminous with radio-activity. Ethereal little place. As though here were a shining vista of Heaven, with the infernal regions where groaning, gibbering things were massed, crowding close upon it.

"There he is!" Jimmy murmured. "By the Gods, there he is!"

We were on a projecting ledge, part way up the grotto's side. And close underneath us, down in a recess of the blue-white, shining floor, Durkin was seated, with the terrified little Yvette beside him. Food and a flagon of alcoholite were on a rock at his elbow.

His voice floated up. "Pretty snug here, eh, Yvette? Little nest for us, while we wait for our men to come and rescue us from Tarl's tyranny. That's a good line, eh? Tarl's tyranny! His New Empire, where everybody has fun! That's a laugh, eh, Yvette?"

Between Jimmy and me, Larry was lying on the ledge. Poor little Larry. His strength was almost gone now. It was as though, guiding us here, his work was done.

"There he is, with her," he murmured. "You—go get him. Save her."

Jimmy was shifting forward, but I shoved him back. "You stay here," I whispered. "I've got the knife—"

I crouched on the brink, with Durkin almost under me. And then I leaped.

CHAPTER VIII

Marriage Dance of the Phantoms

I LANDED on Durkin's shoulders. He let out a gasping roar as the impact felled him. And that was the end of him. My knife went into his chest; plunged deep, and then in a frenzy, I drew it out; slashed his throat. With his blood spurting, he lay twitching. I held Yvette; pressed her head against me so that she might not see.

"You're all right now, darling—"

"Oh, Bob—Bob dear—thank God you came—"

Then the hulk of Durkin lay motionless. With the shuddering little Yvette, I climbed back to the ledge.

"Good work," Jimmy muttered. "But look—poor Larry, he's almost gone."

We bent over him. His bloodless lips were still trying to smile. His glazing eyes focused on us, on Yvette.

"Oh, Larry," she murmured. "I'm so sorry."

"It's—all right." His weak hand fumbled, found hers. "I'm glad I—could help. You—you're so very beautiful—"

He was still clinging to her hand. And then we saw that there was no light in his eyes; no breath from his lips. But on his dead face that little smile still lingered, as though he had taken with him across the Great Border, memory that he had helped the girl he loved . . .

For a time we crouched on the ledge, bathed in the blue-white radiance of the antibacterite. I could feel my body glowing, exhilarated. Soon, I knew, it would begin to shine with a radiance of its own . . . What should we do? Jimmy and I had no plans, save that certainly we couldn't stay here. Our only chance was to get back to the spaceship, praying that we would find it unguarded.

Jimmy and I had studied its operation with Tarl. And Yvette told us now that she had been with her uncle when he had built it. She too understood it. If we could reach it now—

We started back through the tunnels. Again the ghastly glowing things were surging around us. Jimmy was handling Larry's little N-ray cylinder. And suddenly he gasped with a startled oath!

"It's empty, Bob—good God—"

We were trying to pass the lurid green and red cavern where the myriad things were gathered. A great mixed horde of them were surging at us; and as Jimmy's projector died, with gibbering screams, in great tumbling waves they came to the attack!

The end of everything for us! The thought leaped at me as I clutched Yvette. The green-glowing little footballs, with the monstrous rods of red slithering among them, were solid around us.

"Keep your feet!" I shouted at Jimmy. "Shove forward—there's open space ahead."

But there was not. The empty rocks in advance of us, in another second were crowded with an orange horde of slimy, spiny things. I waded into them; kicking them; squashing them. But they clung like glue to my ankles. The passage here was hideous with their screams. Yvette went down, with a hundred little tentacles snatching at her. But Jimmy and I pulled her up.

Then I heard Jimmy gasp: "Oh, Bob—we can't make it! Done for—this time—"

The end . . . A great ten foot monster came wading through the milling mass—monstrous crimson thing with glaring eyes, trumpeting voice, and giant feelers with little suction cups on them. The thing saw us; lunged for us; caught us! . . . The end . . . Within a second we were fighting, engulfed by the slimy, sticky mass . . . Yvette was down . . . Jimmy was down . . . I felt myself fall. The damnable stuff was like hot, red jelly on my face. Smothering me . . .

EVERYTHING was fading . . . Then vaguely I was aware of distant shouts. A big violet ray come stabbing through the lurid darkness . . . Tarl and his men . . . Dimly I realized that they were here—trailing Durkin to the Cave of Light . . .

Then my senses drifted into an abyss of blankness, with only the dim consciousness that the N-rays of Tarl and his men had melted the hideous things that were assailing us; and that we were seized, and being carried back to Tarl's encampment . . .

I came to myself, lying on the floor of the room in which we had formerly been held. Jimmy was sitting beside me; and Tarl was bending over us.

"So you are recovered?" he smiled.

"Yvette," I murmured. "Is she all right?"

"Oh, quite, thank you . . . The ceremony is starting now. I thought you two might want to see it. A momentous thing in my little Empire."

Abruptly he turned and left us. Then I saw that one of his men was here guarding us. "Come on," the fellow growled. "If you don't want to see it, I do. An' I want my turn in it."

Silently we let him shove us out of the room, into the glowing outer darkness. Then another guard joined him. They kept us close with them, holding a flash-gun against us.

"This way," one muttered. "You'll see it all right—but I want my turn too."

At a side of the rocky amphitheatre we crouched on a ledge, with the guards beside us. Weird, ghostly scene. It was almost wholly dark. At the edge of the raised platform, Tarl's men—

nearly a hundred of them—were gathered in a roistering group. Weird, milling throng of ghostly figures. Pallid phantoms, now in the darkness. But their voices floated out over the night-silence, with jibes at each other, and with coarse comments upon the beauty of the girls who now were to be brought out and given to them.

Then I stared out beyond the amphitheatre. The great barrage-curtain of the N-ray glowed there, standing up into the haze of the sky like a vast luminous shield, behind which a myriad bacterites were thronging. Attracted by the activity of the humans here, they crowded close. I could see the patches of green, orange and red to mark the glowing colonies of them. And clusters of baleful eyes . . .

And in the silence, the gibbering, distant little voices were audible—ghastly murmur of menace . . .

"Why don't they start?" one of our guards muttered. "Jeez—am I supposed to stay here, an' just take what's left? I seen the girl I want—"

From some hidden source, music suddenly began welling out into the night air. It brought expectant cries from the gathered, roistering group by the platform. They were abruptly hushed; and the pallid, phantom shapes of them all turned, staring toward the motley, dark little houses of their village. . . .

A procession was coming now from the village—a long line of ghostly shapes. The girls, with their guards walking beside them. . . . Weird procession. They were like pallid, luminous phantoms in the darkness, coming silently along, winding in a turn and then mounting the platform.

AND then I saw Tarl. Tarl, the Emperor. Tarl, the God. His luminous body, encased in its shining suit of flexible white metal, gleamed with a blue-white aura. And beside him was his Goddess. Little Yvette. At first I could just see the slim, luminous shape of her, in her long, white flowing robe, with her black hair coiled high on her head. Slowly she walked, hand in hand with Tarl. His little Empress, with her Emperor beside her, advancing now to their marriage ceremony.

"Sybaris!" "Sybara!" "Sybara, the beautiful!"

From the gathered men the shouts of awed admiration rang out.

"Sybara, the beautiful! Empress! Goddess, we worship you!"

It made my heart go cold. And somehow the shouts, the homage, flung my memory back to that time on Earth when Yvette had been chosen in the contest of beauty. How long ago that seemed now!

"Sybara—" The men were all shouting it. Homage? Awed respect? But I knew that some of them were inflamed by her beauty—envious of Tarl—muttering perhaps to others like themselves that this Emperor was unfair to them. . . . Rebellious men, inflamed now by the alcoholite. Some of them were trying to leap upon the platform, but others pulled them back. I saw one, with a muttered curse, strike another a blow with his fist; but others jumped and separated them.

It was like gunpowder here, with a smouldering fuse dangling over it. . . . And beside Jimmy and me, we could hear now that our two guards were arguing. One guard should be enough here, to watch us, just two slaves. One of them should be able to leave and take his place with the girls. But which one? . . .

The hidden music was welling louder now. A great cacophony of barbaric rhythm. Then as Tarl and Yvette mounted a little dais at one end of the platform, facing the girls who were standing in a line, from somewhere

overhead a light sprang down. A little spotlight. It struck upon Tarl and Yvette. And as though it were stroboscopic, it seemed not only to illumine them, but to make more apparent the aura of pallid opalescent radiation which streamed from their bodies. Little tongues of silver light-fire were leaping upward. Silver fire to make them God-like.

And I caught my breath as I stared at Yvette. The slim glowing outlines of her perfect little body glowed with a silver-blue sheen beneath the robe. And her face was illumined—face of such sheer ethereal beauty that she was transfigured . . .

"Sybara the beautiful—"

The crowd was calling it. Then Tarl raised his hands to silence the awed, admiring cries. The music suddenly was hushed; and in the heavy, strained silence Tarl spoke:

"Men of Cometara—in this solemn moment, your Emperor and your little Empress salute you. By your applause and your homage—you will unite us now—your Emperor and your Empress."

He stood holding Yvette's hand as the shouts rang out, with a great swelling flood of the music . . . And then he and Yvette were seated on the little dais.

"And now, the marriage dance," he said. "You girls were told what to do . . . I want each of you to know that you must be docile—as docile as you are beautiful, in the home and with the husband I am giving you now . . . Women of Cometara—your Emperor and your Empress salute you."

THE girls were circling now, slowly swaying to the rhythm of the music . . . Weird, ghostly ceremonial rite. My heart was pounding, awed as I watched it. Those swaying, dancing girls. One or two stumbled with their terror, but the others caught them, steadied them. Swaying circle of luminous, beautiful little figures, with the light-beam playing upon them. Their filmy drapes were like molten silver fire, with their little luminous bodies beneath . . .

Then at a signal from Tarl, the line had straightened. The men were lined up now on the platform, and the girls were dancing toward them, each quite evidently to join her partner as chance directed when the lines came together. I stared, holding my breath . . . The ghostly figures of the men were suddenly milling in noisy confusion! . . .

Abruptly I found Jimmy clutching at me, here in the darkness. "One of our guards decamped," he whispered. "Only one here now."

And that one, almost at my elbow, was standing, staring at the platform, absorbed in the weird scene . . .

"Listen," Jimmy whispered. "If now we—"

"Look!" I muttered. "Out there by the barrage—"

In a great crescent the huge N-ray barrage still stood quivering. But on its other side now, I could see that the monstrous bacterites were gathered thicker than ever. The music, the lights, the unaccustomed sights and sounds here, were bringing them. And there were gigantic ones out there now —enormous red-glowing things, trumpeting, lunging at the N-ray curtain, trying to break through it . . .

"Jimmy, look!" I whispered. "My God, if those things get through the barrage—"

I checked my whisper; sucked in my breath with a gasp. And Jimmy was numbly staring . . . Up on the platform there had been a commotion among the men. One of them had seized the girl of his choice. She screamed — piercing, throat - splitting little scream of involuntary terror.

It was like a spark in gunpowder—that scream. Suddenly all the half-drunken men were milling, shoving at each other; seizing the girls. Then they were fighting. A flash-gun spat; a man and a girl fell . . .

Like fire in prairie grass the turmoil spread . . . Tarl was on his feet shouting. But his voice was lost in the din . . . The shouts of the fighting men; screams of the girls as they were seized and carried away . . . I saw one man lift a little luminous girl-shape in his arms, running with her, trying to leap down from the platform. Others jumped on him, tearing her from him . . .

Stabbing little bolts from flash-guns were hissing through the melee now. Already it had spread as the men ran and fought—spread down from the platform. A dozen fighting, cursing men lunged over toward the N-ray barrage curtain. Perhaps in their wild murderous frenzy, they staggered against the N-ray controls. Whatever the cause, abruptly there was an electronic hiss off there.

The barrage-curtain went dead! A great darkness sprang there—the darkness of the outer distance suddenly clearly visible . . . The world of the bacterites. They were free to get in here now! Great milling waves of monstrous red, green and orange-glowing things. With hideous, blood-curdling cries of triumph welling up into a torrent of gibbering sound, they came lunging forward!

CHAPTER IX

The End of an Empire

FOR that ghastly second, Jimmy and I crouched transfixed with horror. The whole weird, ghostly scene was in chaos now—men, some of them carrying girls, were running; scrambling; fighting, with shouting, cursing voices. Milling, phantom blobs, eerie in the darkness. And now the bacterites in great waves were pouring forward—bouncing green blobs, slithering rods like snakes writhing upon each other. And with them, giant, lurching masses of crimson pulp, with trumpeting, screaming voices . . .

"Bob—for God's sake—come on!" Jimmy was twitching at me. Beside us our guard had decamped.

Together, Jimmy and I leaped from our little ledge. To do what? There was in our minds only that we must try to get to Yvette . . .

This ghastly turmoil! Between us and the nearest end of the platform a wave of the bacterites had surged. I saw where a dozen or so of the running men and screaming girls already had been caught—humans wildly fighting, with flailing arms and legs kicking. Some of them already had gone down, with the giant germs swarming upon them—tearing at them . . .

"Jimmy! Keep with me!" I gasped. "This way—"

Leaping, struggling to keep our feet, we plunged through an end of the swarm of germs. They scattered before us; broke and squashed under our tread. Just small ones here at the moment . . . Then we passed through them; came to the platform end; leaped upon it. One of the bandits lay here, with a dead girl beside him, both of them drilled by a flash-gun. I swiftly stooped. In the dead man's hand his own flash gun was gripped. I seized it. And over another body, Jimmy was stooping.

"N-ray projector," he muttered. "God knows, we'll need it."

At the other end of the platform, still on the little dais, the shining figure of Tarl was standing, with Yvette crouching beside him. Tarl the Em-

peror. Master of his little New World. As though numbed, in the midst of the roaring screaming chaos he was standing staring at the wreck of his Empire. His little world—the basis of his mad dreams — crumbling now before his eyes . . . For that tumultuous moment he had stood stricken, numbed with his disillusionment . . .

And then he saw Jimmy and I as we came running across the platform. His hand fumbled for a second at his belt. My flash-bolt hissed at him; missed. And suddenly he thought better of trying to fight. Swiftly he stooped; seized Yvette. Gathering her up in his arms, he turned, leaped from the platform and ran.

I gripped at Jimmy. "Wait!" I gasped. "Just a minute—this other way—it may be better."

Down on the ground, between us and the running Tarl, like a bursting dam, waves of the bacterites were suddenly surging. But to the left of them the rocks were comparatively open. And now I could see that Tarl was heading for a break in the shining cliff, off there to the left. A little glowing tunnel-passage. The antibacterite radiance from it held off the swarming germ-monsters. And then Tarl, still carrying Yvette, plunged into it . . .

Jimmy and I circled to the left; and in another moment we had reached the passage-mouth. Plunged into it . . .

"Easy!" I warned. "Don't let him ambush us!"

We slowed to a walk. Cautious; straining our eyes in the pallid glowing gloom . . . A little grotto was ahead. And then we saw him. He was climbing up the rocks of the sloping grotto wall, with his arm around Yvette as she struggled beside him. Already he was fifty feet back from us and some ten feet higher.

"Stand still!" I shouted. "Damn you, we've got you, Tarl!"

HE whirled, with Yvette held in front of him. "Down!" I murmured to Jimmy. "Watch him—he's armed!"

Jimmy and I dropped into a rock crevice. And above us Tarl stood staring, with Yvette clasped to him like a shield. He was faintly smiling. Green and red and yellow glare painted him —luridly edging his white figure; tinting his pale grim face. And now I realized that there was a brink beside him—a pit of lurid radiance. Bacterites were down there. A huge lower grotto-pit, teeming with the writhing luminous germs. The glow from them surged upward. And they were aware of Tarl. Their legs and tentacles scratched the sheer rock-face as they struggled to climb, one upon the other. And their ghastly little voices gibbered in the subterranean silence.

"Got me?" Tarl murmured. "Why —perhaps you have."

But we did not dare fire for fear of hitting Yvette. I sent a bolt over Tarl's head. It made him laugh ironically.

"You can drill me, no doubt," he said. "And her too, if you fire."

His hand was at his belt. Jimmy and I sank lower behind our rock, expecting his shot. His little flash-gun was in his hand. He held it up; clicked it to verify what no doubt he had realized—that it was empty of charge. And his thin smile still twitched at his lips as nonchalantly he tossed the useless weapon away.

It clattered down on the rocks, almost in front of us. And suddenly Tarl was saying.

"My little Empire—not quite what I had hoped, Dean." The same smooth irony was in his voice. But on his pallid face now, and in his dark glowing eyes, somehow there seemed tragedy. His mad dream—but surely he must have cherished it; believed in its fulfillment. "My little Empire—

and now my first slaves rise to kill me . . . That's rather a joke on me, isn't it, Dean?"

Then suddenly he had cast Yvette from him—shoved her behind him. And alone he stepped to the brink of the pit. Fascinated, I withheld my shot. The glare of the gibbering, scrambling, monstrous germs painted him as he stood there. He was staring down at me, still with that slow ironic smile.

"I would not like my slave to kill me," he reiterated gently. "The great Tarl—to be killed by his slave."

Then slowly he turned, staring down into the luminous pit. For a second more he poised, balanced on the lip of the abyss. He was still faintly smiling as he plunged forward—little plummeting shape . . . Then the screaming, scrambling things engulfed him, and he was gone . . .

With Yvette, Jimmy and I ran for the spaceship. Fighting, melting through the hordes of ghastly squirming germs with our N-ray darting before us, at last we were through the passages. The little oblong vehicle lay dark. A few of the bandits seemed almost to have gotten here. I saw a milling cluster of red-tentacled things picking and fighting over what once had been a human body. Jimmy's N-ray melted them.

And then we were in the ship, slamming its lower door-slide just as a great screaming mass of the giant bacterites thudded against it . . .

In the control turret we sat staring down as the ship slowly rose through the darkness. I had thought we would see no more of Tarl's little encampment. But presently we passed a break in the side-wall of the cliff. Below us the straggling group of buildings and the rocky amphitheatre for a moment lay spread.

GHASTLY scene. A tumbling sea of orange, red and green things. Triumphant, r a p a c i o u s bacterites. They swarmed, again in undisputed possession of their world. And only in one or two places were the shreds of human bodies still visible—little ghastly fragments which the monster germs were picking apart and carrying away. . . .

Yvette and I are married now. The new era—the era of spaceflight—has come to Earth now. Yvette's uncle and her father—the world has them to thank for spaceflight, and for the new secret of health. They say that in a few years, when the new science has been organized, everyone on Earth will be immune to disease; and immune to the ravages of old age . . .

The Comet is still in the sky. It has rounded the Sun now and is on its way out. Alien little world. I shudder always when I look at it. An alien thing—every living creature on it, an enemy of mankind. But nature of necessity produces evil as well as good—evil to be fought and conquered. Surely no man can live and thrive as a sybarite. Nothing but bodily ease; pleasure without work; society without law. Surely that is impossible.

And I think that we may all—when things seem wrong for us—take comfort in the thought that our established order of upward struggle is best. For without it, we would be doomed.

BIG AMAZING FEATURE-LENGTH NOVELETTE OF INTERPLANETARY BANDITS!

THE EARTH-STEALERS

By FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER, JR.

Author of "The Stronger," etc.

Hugh Sheridan didn't see super-gravity as the end of life for mortals—Hugh claimed men could invent machines to help with all the trivial things, like lighting a cigarette, or moving a chair near the stove, or sitting down and standing up. . . .

Carole went down before the electric lash, screaming in agony!

THE Science Building of Terrestrial University thrust like a slender finger at the sky, very white against the blue-black night.

The slim blonde girl paused at its ornate entrance, admiring the effect of the moonlight upon the glistening crystalloid walls. The flash of a red-beamed time signal from the summit, however, intruded its silent warning upon her reflections and she pushed open the big door, made her way along the shadowy

corridor toward the Physics Lab.

The tap of the girl's heels, echoing through the passageway, brought sudden life to the Physics Laboratory. Bright astralux arcs snapped on, and the glass-fronted door swung open. A tall, rather weary-looking young man stepped into the corridor, extended strong, grease-stained hands.

"Carole!" His tired face broke into a smile. "You're early!"

"Thought I'd stop in any say hello before Dad arrives with the visiting fireman," the girl said, entering the laboratory.

"Fireman is right," Hugh Sheridan chuckled. "He's a Venusian, isn't he?"

"Professor Dercu, head of Terwan Tanu. That means Central University, Dad tells me. The typical Venusian tourist, complete with asbestos suit and dark glasses."

"Can't blame them," Hugh grunted, bending over the tangle of wire on his work-table. "Even June in New York is frigid after a normal temperature of seventy degrees Centigrade. And their eyes aren't used to the sunlight. Venus is just one big swamp, all fogs and huge vegetable growths. Like a pot of stewing spinach. And I guess our Terrestrial tourists are just as funny-looking, floundering around in air-cooled suits, fog-lights in their hands. Why don't people stay on the worlds they were evolved for, anyhow?" With nervous irritability he picked up the bit of wire, fitted it into the mass of machinery that blocked the end of the room. "I wish this Dercu were in some place hotter than Venus. Why he has to come poking around here tonight . . . !"

"Well" . . . Carole Worden laughed . . . "he's leaving for home in the morning. And wanted to have a look at the Science Building before he left. Quite an honor for dear old Terrestrial U. So Dad thought that as long as your new generator was ready for a first test, Professor Dercu might be interested in watching the experiment. Your big chance to gain interplanetary recognition, my lad."

"The darn generator probably won't work," Hugh muttered, with an inventor's pessimism. "Things never do the first time. And I'm not sure what it's capable of, anyhow. Besides, the power supply . . ." He broke off as footsteps sounded in the hallway.

"And this" . . . it was Dr. Worden's voice, suavely pleasant . . . "is our Physics Laboratory."

HUGH swung about to face the doorway. In it stood Carole's father, ruddy-faced, grey-haired, very natty in his well-cut fibroid suit. Beside him stood a short, immensely powerful figure, swathed in an electrically heated asbestos suit. Within the tinted glass helmet that covered the Venusian's head, his face could be seen, dark, bulge-eyed, emotionless in spite of the fact that his thick reptilian lips were drawn back in a mechanical smile.

"Professor Dercu," Dr. Worden announced. "My daughter Carole and one of our most promising young physicists, Hugh Sheridan."

"So happy to know you." The Venusian's words, enunciated in precise English, issued from a tiny microphone atop his helmet. "A great pleasure indeed."

"Thanks, professor." Carole took the asbestos-encased hand. "I hope you've enjoyed your stay on Earth."

"Ah, yes." Dercu's eyes lit up. "A magnificent planet! So undeveloped, so rich in minerals! I wish we Venusians had as well-stocked a world! But not" . . . he laughed . . . "so far from the Sun. The dryness, the cold here are too much for us, accustomed as we are to our own planet's dampness and warmth. To have a world so full of mineral wealth in our own orbit about the sun, ah, that would be ideal!

You are very fortunate in your rich, splendid planet!"

"We think so, too," Dr. Worden smiled, moved toward the strange mechanism at the end of the laboratory. "This is Mr. Sheridan's generator, the one of which I was speaking earlier."

Dercu followed his host, walking with high, bounding strides.

"You must pardon my unsteadiness," he murmured. "I am still unaccustomed to earth's gravity. Our own planet, being larger, has a stronger pull. I understand, Mr. Sheridan, that your device deals with this force?"

"More or less." Hugh turned, switched on the astralux lights above the intricate mass of machinery. "Rather complicated, isn't it?"

Professor Dercu, peering through the glass front of his helmet, shook an incredulous head. One entire end of the laboratory was crowded with machinery, queer equipment. An immense cone of lead hung from the ceiling, its apex, pointing downward, lopped off to form a concave depression. Like the crater of an extinct volcano, Carole thought . . . an upside down volcano. Rising from the floor was a second such cone, this one right side up. Between the two was suspended a huge cylinder, around which were glass tubes, all joining in a curious mechanism at its hub-cap. From this same mechanism two stationary copper tubes projected, to be joined, some seven feet from the great cylinder in a gleaming helix of smaller copper tubing. Immediately beneath the helix was a strong wooden table upon which rested an ordinary clay brick. Powerful motors, run by atomic engines, were connected by drive shafts to the cylinder.

"Hmm." Dr. Worden studied the apparatus intently. "An interesting set-up, eh, Dercu?"

"Quite." The Venusian nodded. "But I do not understand just what its purpose is . . ."

"Power," Hugh replied. "Power, I hope, of an entirely new sort. You are familiar, naturally, with the age-old principle of the electric generator . . . that is the cutting of the lines of force between two electro magnets. That creates an electric current . . . a flow of electrons. Now we know that electrons are associated with magnetic fields and protons . . . 2000 times heavier . . . are associated with gravitational fields. In this device before you I have tried to create a situation analogous to the electric generator. The 'magnets' are, of course, ridiculously disproportionate, one being the entire gravitational pull of the earth, the other only that of the lead cone, the floors of the building above. Yet in spite of this fact I hope to get a slight flow of electro-gravitational force. You will note that instead of copper wiring about the armature I am using tubes filled with hydrogen, which, when revolved in the field, should produce a flow of protons or electro-gravitational energy. Passing through the helix an induced current of this new force should be set up in the brick. We'll see!"

HUGH turned to the wall, pulled a switch. A whine of power sang in the motors and the great mass of apparatus blazed into life. Tubes glowed, giving off a weird purplish light, lambent blue flame leaped between spark terminals, a smell of ozone filled the air.

"Now!" Hugh touched a second lever. "Watch the brick!"

With a staccato crackling, current leaped into the big armature. Slowly at first, but increasing in speed each second, it began to revolve. Soon it was a grey blur, spinning furiously. Breathless, Carole leaned forward. Something was happening beneath the helix! The air about it took on a wavy, distorted quality, like the radiator of an old-

fashioned gasoline automobile when overheated!

All at once the clay brick began to glow. Carole felt a queer prickling sensation on her face, as though a thousand invisible particles were striking her. Unconsciously she backed away. Dercu, his eyes narrow, watched the mass of machinery closely.

"Success!" Dr. Worden shook his head, smiling. "And failure! Energy is being released, Hugh, just as you expected. But in the form of rays! Rays covering the entire spectrum! Cosmic rays, x-rays, Coolidge rays, radio waves . . . all useless! Energy . . . but unable to turn generators, to drive planes, to power factories! Too bad, eh, Dercu?"

For a long moment Hugh Sheridan's eyes rested on the glowing clay brick. Six months' work, only to achieve success that was in itself failure! Biting his lip, he picked up a pair of tongs, leaned forward to remove the brick from its stand. As he did so a startled exclamation burst from his lips.

"What is it?" Dercu moved closer, his electrically-heated suit radiating warmth.

"Don't know." Hugh tugged at the big pincers. "These tongs seem to weigh a ton. And I can't budge the brick!"

"Can't move that bit of clay?" Worden smiled contemptuously. "Here! Give me the tongs!"

Taking the pincers from Hugh's hand, he clamped them upon the brick, pulled. It did not move. With red-faced exasperation Dr. Worden tugged once more at the tongs, threw his weight upon them. And still the brick remained stubbornly in position. Carole and the stolid Venusian watched, breathless.

"You see?" Hugh stepped forward. "Perhaps if we both try . . ."

Worden nodded. Muscles cracking, they gripped the tongs, lifted the brick from the table.

"Weighs a good four hundred pounds," Dr. Worden panted. "In the field of the helix, that is! Let's swing it clear and see . . . Good Lord! Now it's perfectly normal! Enormously heavy in the field, normal outside of it! Incredible!"

"But why?" Carole demanded. "I don't understand!"

"Neither do any of us!" Dercu's keen, diamond-bright eyes snapped excitedly. "This is a greater achievement than just power. Greater, perhaps, than we realize. What is your guess, Mr. Sheridan?"

FOR a long moment Hugh remained motionless. Suddenly he drew paper and pencil from his pocket, made rapid calculations.

"Professor Dercu!" Hugh's voice rang with triumph. "I don't have to guess! I know what it is! It . . . It's super-gravity!"

"Eh!" The Venusian frowned questioningly. "Super-gravity?"

"Of course! Gravity is quite similar to magnetism! Cut a magnetic field and you have a flow of electrons . . . electricity! And cut a gravitational field and you have a flow of protons . . . gravity! Within the field of that helix the brick is charged with such a force . . . is given super-gravity!"

As Hugh finished speaking, the others in the room remained silent. Dr. Worden stroked his smooth-shaven chin, staring at the machine. The man from Venus seemed lost in a dream, his expression intent, his eyes dim and far-away as though he were visualizing the great changes that this hour of discovery must bring to the lives of millions throughout the Solar system.

"Hugh!" Carole broke the silence. "Think what it means! The secret of gravity! Sought after by mankind

since the dawn of time! A new order of things for the world!"

"Perhaps." The Venusian straightened up, like a man just awakened. "Of course, this apparatus can only *increase* gravity, make things heavier. But if Mr. Sheridan is able to work out the reverse process, somehow, interplanetary travel would be a simple thing. No rockets, no clumsy motors. To lessen gravity, ah, that would be a boon to humanity! And with this start, Mr. Sheridan, I feel sure you will succeed!" He glanced at his watch shook his head. "And now, I fear, I must leave. My ship takes off in the morning and I have so much to do. Congratulations, Mr. Sheridan! I wish you luck! As we say on Venus, *aloteh en tawil!*"

"I'll see you to your car," Dr. Worden said. "Come along, Carole. And how about you, Hugh? Don't you think a celebration of some sort is in order?"

"Not just yet." Hugh shook his head. "I want to make my notes on the experiment. Goodbye, Dr. Worden! 'Night, Carole! Bon voyage, Professor Dercu!"

When the others had left Hugh stared in sombre silence at the huge gravity generator. His hopes of a new source of power had proved futile. An interesting phenomenon, this super-gravity, but useless. And in spite of Professor Dercu's polite encouragement, he knew that the reverse of the process, lessening gravity, was only a dream. Strange, how quickly the Venusian's enthusiasm had waned; it was almost as though he had deliberately sought to discredit the invention. Still, an impractical discovery was hardly calculated to thrill so renowned a scientist. With a weary sigh, Hugh turned to the table and commenced to make a detailed account of the experiment.

It was nearly midnight when he completed his notes; yawning sleepily, he leaned back in the chair, rubbed his aching eyes. And as he did so, he heard the soft, slithering footsteps behind him.

Abruptly Hugh leaped to his feet, spun about. Only the merest fraction of a second's glimpse, he had, of the dark, shadowy figure facing him; then from a tube in the intruder's hand a cloud of yellow opaque vapor issued, blinding, choking. Hugh staggered forward, lungs on fire, clutched weakly at his assailant. Silently the man raised the metal tube, and in a swift sweep of his arm, brought it crashing down upon Hugh's head. With a gasp of pain the scientist toppled to the floor, unconscious.

CHAPTER II

THE home of Dr. Worden, as most of the faculty of Terrestrial University, was on Fifth Avenue, overlooking what in former years had been Central Park. Now the great buildings of the college dominated the square of green, rearing like giant obelisks above the trees, the shady winding paths. From his window the professor could see the students, tiny specks far below, walking to and from classes, see the gleaming glass streets, three tiers of them, that circled the grassy oasis. In the Park . . . the old name clung . . . there were no levels other than the ground itself; to cross it automobiles were forced to descend circular ramps to the lower streets or circle it by means of the high-speed driveways of the upper tier. A soft and rather beautiful picture the university campus made, not unlike cool green water at the bottom of some titanic stone-lined well.

This bright September day as Dr. Worden stood at his window the beauty

of the scene was lost upon him. His mind had returned to a night some three months before, the night Hugh Sheridan had been attacked, his notebook, his plans, stolen, and the gravity generator ruthlessly smashed. A blow to the pride of the University it had been, that one of its post-graduate students should be attacked in the Physics laboratory. For two months Hugh had fought for life, his skull fractured, his lungs seared by gas. And for what?

Dr. Worden frowned, reflectively polishing his glasses. That was the strangest part of all. Why should anyone go to such extremes for an invention that was unquestionably valueless? Had it been a means of decreasing gravity, it would, of course, have been priceless. But to add to gravity . . .! Dr. Worden shook his head hopelessly, turned to the mass of examination papers on his desk. He had just commenced to mark them when footsteps sounded in the hall outside and the door swung open.

Carole, very lovely in a close-fitting plastex sports dress, entered the study, followed by Hugh, pale from his months in bed.

"Well, well." Dr. Worden pushed aside his papers, smiling. "How's your patient?"

"Still able to break a hundred." Carole dropped her golf bag on the couch. "And still determined to find out who attacked him. Anything from the police?"

"Nothing." Her father shook his head. "But a radiogram from Venus."

"Ah!" Hugh leaned forward eagerly. "I've thought all along that your friend Professor Dercu was behind it. Maybe he noticed something that we didn't. Until I build another generator I can't tell just what electro-gravitational waves are capable of. They might even be lethal. . . ."

"No." Dr. Worden shook his head. "This clears Dercu, poor chap. The Venusian authorities have given up all hope for his ship. He took off you remember, the morning after the attack, aboard a Venusian cruiser. The ship has remained unreported since. Unquestionably lost. There were meteor storms in space that week. Besides, Carole and I told any number of people about your discovery that night. The news probably spread, exaggerated greatly, until some criminal, thinking it the secret of lessening gravity . . ."

"And it doesn't matter, anyhow," Carole laughed. "Hugh can build another generator if he wants to, and if Dercu stole the notes they didn't do him any good." She perched herself upon the edge of her father's desk, placed an arm about his shoulders. "You've been worrying too much about this. So's Hugh. How about the three of us taking the old family bus and flying out to Chicago for the afternoon? The rocket races are being held there this week and I thought perhaps . . ."

"I might have known it." Dr. Worden shook his head, chuckling. "She just never lets me catch up on my work, Hugh! Well, you'll have to call up the garage, tell them to put in twenty gallons of tri-oxine. If Hugh can stand your flying, I guess I can!"

AN hour later the three of them were in Carole's plane, streaking toward Chicago. Hugh, banishing worry from his mind, chatted gaily with Dr. Worden, speculating on the results of the rocket-races. Below them the green fields of western New York lay basking in the warm autumn sun, while planes of every type, from high stratoliners to puffing commercial ships, dotted the sky.

"Grand day for the races." Hugh settled back in his seat, glanced through the glassex windows. "Flying

a bit low, aren't you?"

"Why . . . so I am!" The girl glanced in surprise at the altimeter. "I'll open her up a little."

She advanced the throttle. The roar of the rockets increased, but still the plane dropped, plummeting toward earth with sickening speed.

"Falling! Faster than before!" Hugh cried. "More power! Quick!"

Carole, her face pale, opened the throttle to its limit. The plane's rate of descent was checked, but it continued to lose altitude.

"What is it?" Dr. Worden gasped. "What's wrong? Motor running perfectly and yet . . ." He broke off, staring from the window in horror. Inexorably the ground was rising to meet them!

"Carole!" Hugh gripped the girl's shoulder. "Try to level off! Hurry! We're going to . . ." Before he could finish the sentence a splintering, crashing noise filled his ears. He had one swift picture of Carole's terrified countenance and then . . . oblivion.

It was the sound of his name, repeated in Carole's voice, that greeted Hugh on his return to consciousness. Dazedly he opened his eyes. Carole and Dr. Worden were kneeling beside him, cut, bruised, their clothing torn. In the background he could see the wrecked plane.

"Hugh!" Carole whispered. "You . . . you're all right?"

"Yes. Lucky the rockets checked our fall. But I don't see yet why we crashed." He made a movement to raise himself, then gasped. He was powerless to move! Held down by some invisible, satanic force!

"You, too?" Dr. Worden's tones were despairing. "Carole and I felt it also! Took every ounce of our strength to pull ourselves up! Something terrible . . something unknown . . ." Slowly, laboriously, he reached out, gripped Hugh's arm, dragging him into a sitting position.

"Right . . . think I can make it, now." Still weak from the blow he had received, Hugh struggled to his feet, glanced about.

THE plane had landed in a meadow, a section of the smiling farm land they had seen from the air. As Hugh's gaze swept it, curious changes became noticeable. The bright grass, the gay wild flowers, no longer stood proudly erect. Each blade, each stem, was bent, and lay crushed against the ground, as though flattened by some mighty roller. Trees, too, were affected. Many of their smallest twigs had been snapped off clean and littered the ground about their trunks; the larger limbs, instead of reaching toward the sky, were bowed dejectedly to the ground. In a neighboring field a herd of cows lay upon their sides, mooing plaintively, while here and there birds fluttered along the ground, unable to rise.

"Good God!" Hugh whispered, horrified. "Don't you see! An electro-gravitational field, just like the one I created in the laboratory! Super-gravity!"

"Oh!" Carole's voice shook. "The world, weighed down, planes wrecked everywhere! Hugh, we've got to get back to New York, quickly, tell what we know! Unless we act at once . . ."

"Right!" Hugh squared his shoulders, glanced at the highway that passed the meadow. "Come on!"

With dragging, heavy feet they staggered toward the highway. Hugh had taken only a dozen steps before his heart began to pound, his face to drip sweat. It was as though he carried some tremendously heavy weight, a weight that bore him down, lay like leaden ingots upon his lean muscles. The air, too, was more dense, very thick

and oppressive. Shoulders bent, they ploughed ahead, panting, with a gliding, ski-like motion. Although only a few hundred yards to the road, they were completely exhausted by the time they reached it.

"What . . . what next?" Dr. Worden gasped.

"Rest," Carole whispered. "Can't walk further . . ."

Her father nodded, his eyes on the road ahead. Over the brow of a slight hill a big, tear-shaped truck was approaching, its radex motors whining in shrill complaint as it crept toward them. Dr. Worden stepped to the center of the glass-surfaced road, waved heavy arms.

With a hiss of compression brakes the truck stopped. The driver, a red-eyed, tired-faced man, peered from the cab.

"Now what?" he demanded. "Another bridge down?"

"No. Our plane crashed." Hugh pointed to the wrecked ship. "Thought if you were going to New York, we might get a lift."

"I'm going to New York, all right," the truck driver grunted. "Not that I expect to reach it, now the world's gone crazy. Twin-jet, twelve-cycle motor in this bus and I can't get her over twenty. Bridges down, stalled traffic at the foot of every hill, wrecked planes everywhere. Like Judgment Day! You people drive?"

Three nods of assent answered him.

"Okay." The truckman opened the door of the cab. "I'll need help. Just holding your arms up on the wheel gets yuh. Hop in!"

It was twelve hours before they reached New York . . . twelve hours through a land of low sullen clouds, of bowed, fear-stricken people, of crushed, ruined crops. At last Manhattan . . . the truck-driver left them on an upper street level near Columbus Circle, drove off with a weary nod of farewell.

New York was a city of slow motion. Tired, drooping pedestrians crept along the streets, the few cars in operation ground laboriously forward, and thick foggy air clung like a shroud about the tall buildings. An atmosphere of lethargy, of despair gripped those who ventured abroad.

Here a husband and wife bent over a perambulator, both straining to lift a baby from it; here a grocery clerk toiled along, barely able to move under the weight of a roast of beef; here a slow motion dog dragged himself awkwardly in pursuit of a slow motion cat; here a scrap of paper, dropped from the window of a skyscraper, fell like a stone to the ground.

SUBWAYS, unsafe with the added weight above them, were closed, and exhausted workmen were building additional supports for the three levels of glass streets. Already some of the older bridges and by-passes had collapsed, while lesser debris, signs, electrical wires, odds and ends of every description, littered the streets. A dim, fantastic dream world it seemed to Carole, tottering along between her father and Hugh.

The Worden home, when they at last reached it, presented a scene of utter desolation. Delicate antique tables had collapsed under the weight of books and vases; couches sagged, as though supporting invisible guests; curtain rods bent beneath the pull of velvet portiers; pictures, torn from the walls by their increased weight, lay scattered about.

"Careful what chairs you sit in," Worden cautioned. "Only the strongest will support us now. I'll try the radio . . ."

He snapped the switch of the tele-

vision set; an announcer's worried face appeared on the screen and his dull voice filled the room.

". . . more bulletins from the Central News Bureau," he was saying. "The calamity which descended upon the world some fifteen hours ago has shown no signs of abating. Industry is at a standstill, since power output is insufficient to take care of the new requirements. Moreover, plants everywhere have shut down because of damage to delicate apparatus and machinery worn out by the tremendous new frictional drag. It is believed that engines of every sort will have to be replaced by equipment designed to stand up under the additional stresses. From abroad we learn that the failure of generators has shut off electricity, plunging Europe into darkness. How long our own power plants will remain in operation we cannot say. Transportation is paralyzed. Planes, except for a few of the most high-powered, are unable to remain aloft. Vessels at sea are in distress through engine trouble while land travel moves at a snail's pace. Space ships, alone able to cope with the pull, are already booked by refugees for months in advance.

"From all nations we hear of universal destruction of crops, presaging a world-wide famine. The collapse of buildings and similar property damage continues, while the death toll mounts. Scientists are at a loss to explain the gravitational increases, but warn us to expect a new order of things and to hope that in time the human race will adjust itself to these conditions. Meanwhile, we must build stronger structures, must introduce machines to do such formerly trivial things as waxing floors, carrying suitcases, or moving that favorite armchair nearer the fire. Steps must be replaced everywhere as soon as possible by elevators . . . it is estimated that over a hundred thousand deaths have occurred in this country alone due to heart failure on the part of persons trying to run up steps, perform acts of physical strength to which they were formerly accustomed. Working hours must be halved, since even such light tasks as typing or filing wear a normal person out in a few hours. Falls of only a few feet are violent, dangerous."

The announcer paused, glanced at a slip of paper handed him by an assistant. When he spoke again, his voice quavered. "Ladies and gentlemen! I have just received notice from the Mr. Wilson observatory that the earth is approaching the sun! Super-gravity is causing it to abandon its previous orbit, circle in toward Venus! Increases in temperature are inevitable and astronomers are unable to ascertain whether our new orbit will be sufficiently distant from the sun to support human life! The moon, also, will be drawn nearer although there seems little likelihood of its falling onto earth. The increased heat from the sun, however, is the most dangerous factor. A mean increase of fifty degrees would render the tropics uninhabitable, destroy crops, necessitate mass immigration. Unless super-gravity is . . ."

THE commentator's face faded from view, his voice trailed off into silence. Carole turned the dials, shook her head hopelessly.

"Gone," she whispered. "The city generators . . . burned out . . ."

"But . . ." Dr. Worden stared with dull, bewildered eyes at his companions . . . "the earth, approaching the orbit of Venus! Impossible to provide especially cooled suits for all mankind, with our machinery useless! Floods when the polar caps melt, eternal scalding fogs, starvation! Horrible! It's the end of life . . ."

"For us!" Hugh laughed harshly. "But not for Venusians!"

"What!" Dr. Worden muttered. "You mean . . ."

"I mean that the Venusians are stealing earth!" Hugh cried. "Don't you see? Dercu's ship, they said, was lost. But suppose it wasn't . . . suppose it landed secretly on Venus with the plans of the gravity generator, proved its effectiveness to the Supreme Council? Wouldn't they send an expedition to some deserted part of Terra to act up vast gravity generators, increase this planet's gravity until it was within Venus's orbit? Easy enough with atomic engines. At a single stroke they wipe out humanity and transform our world into one ideal for colonization by Venusians . . . and Venusians alone! First earth, then perhaps other planets, new worlds for the men of Venus!"

"Stealing the earth!" Carole whispered. "It's fantastic . . . unbelievable! And nothing we can do . . ."

"But there is!" Hugh straightened up, his jaw set in stern lines. "The generators set up by the Venusians have to be in some hiding place here on earth! And once they're shut off, Terra will circle back to her true orbit! That place has got to be found, destroyed! I'm going to Washington, tell them what I know!"

CHAPTER III

THE big reception room was hot, unbearably so. Waves of muggy heat swept like jets of steam through the open windows, oppressive, stifling. About this, the sixtieth floor of the State Department Building, great black clouds rolled, ominous, incredibly low. Hugh Sheridan, glancing from a window, frowned at the inferno beneath. Washington was a desolate ruin. The Potomac, bursting from its banks, had transformed the city into a huge lake. The lower street levels, the first ten floors of all buildings, had been engulfed by the rising water. Within two weeks, experts calculated, the river would have covered the last street level, cutting off all communication between the great government buildings. Already boats were evacuating, shifting the archives of the various departments to higher ground. Hugh, staring at the dark muddy waters, swung about impatiently.

"Mr. Cheyney in yet?" he demanded.

The sleek young secretary shook her head.

"Not yet, sir. He has been very busy during the crisis. Unless you have an appointment . . ."

"An appointment?" Hugh raged. "Good God! Two weeks hitch-hiking, walking, crawling, to get here! And now another two weeks cooling my heels in this damned waiting room! Haven't I made it clear that I know the secret of super-gravity, that I need the help of the government in overcoming it! Unless Cheyney sees me soon, it'll be too late!"

"I'm sorry." The girl's voice was icy. "Mr. Cheyney is too busy to bother with every crank who comes here to 'save the world!'"

Hugh glanced up. Across the glass-fronted door marked "Private" he could see the shadow of a lean, hawk-faced man, pacing back and forth. Without a moment's hesitation Hugh thrust aside the outraged secretary, burst into the office.

"Here!" The lean grey man whirled about, frowning. "What does this mean?"

"Mean?" Hugh laughed harshly. "It means that I'm able to tell you just what's causing this increase in gravity, that . . ."

The Secretary shook his head wear-

ily, reached for a button on his desk. Hugh's hand shot out, gripped his wrist.

"Call your assistants when I've finished, if you wish," he snapped. "But right now you're going to listen!" With swift, staccato sentences he launched into his story.

When he had finished, Cheyney smiled pityingly.

"Fantastic!" he murmured. "We maintain the friendliest relations with Venus. And assuming you had perfected a gravity generator, assuming this Dercu had stolen it, may I ask why? What advantage to them to increase this world's gravity?"

"Why?" Hugh spun about, pointed out at the rolling clouds of steam, the ceaseless drizzle of rain. "That's why. The Venusians don't want earth as long as it remains cool and dry! Don't want it if they have to go about in superheated suits, half-blinded by the sun's glare, any more than we'd want their planet as a place of habitation if we were confined to air-conditioned robots. Their plan is to transform earth into a second Venus! To wipe out man and his civilization, replace it with their own! And they're doing it! Already the heat in the tropics is too great for human life! Even here in the temperate zone it's boiling! Floods everywhere as the polar caps melt! The atmosphere choked with moisture, ceaseless rains, strange tropical growths everywhere! All earth is becoming a green hell of marshes, bogs, covered with vines, giant ferns, impenetrable jungles! Machinery broken down by super-gravity, our crops buried in mud, overgrown with marsh foliage, millions dead or dying from the heat! Earth is becoming a twin to Venus! In six months humanity will be extinct!"

"A gravity generator . . . Venusians stealing this planet . . ." Cheyney straightened up abruptly, shook his head. "But it's impossible, of course! Merely some cosmic disturbance." He reached for the button on his desk.

HUGH watched him, despairing With a motion of his finger the Secretary was sealing the doom of the world. Skepticism, fear of being laughed at, man's refusal to accept anything out of the normal . . .

Suddenly the door of the office burst open, and a red-faced, perspiring man entered the room.

"Well, Hollis?" Cheyney barked. "What now?"

"Radiogram, sir." The under-secretary's voice shook. "From Colonel Leigh, military attache to our embassy on Venus. I've decoded it. It . . . it's incredible!"

Cheyney picked up the report, read, half-aloud.

"United States Embassy, Thantis, Venus. November 17th. While governmental agencies continue to express condolences on disasters to Terra, we find a disturbing undercurrent in semi-official quarters. There is talk of 'our new colonies' and surreptitious praise of one Dercu along with mention of his being appointed governor-general of these colonies. Contempt for non-Venusians is voiced openly. As the terrestrial situation grows more acute and earth's military machines are known to be seriously impaired, these manifestations grow more apparent. It is rumored that for three months a special colonial bureau has been in operation, training men for foreign service. We note a curious phrase used in Venusian newscasts on the evening of the tenth. 'When Dercu returns in triumph with his stupendous gift to our people.' Ambassadors of other terrestrial governments confirm these disquieting phenomena, although the Martian legation refuses comment. Suggest an immediate investigation. It is our opinion that the Venusian government is aware

of the source, if not actually the cause, of terrestrial cataclysm. (Signed) Leigh."

"You see?" Hollis, the under-secretary, snapped. "They're stealing earth! And Mars refuses comment, naturally, knowing that the destruction of humanity will free them from terrestrial domination! While the governments of both planets are sending us messages of condolence! It's war . . . a silent, undeclared war!"

Cheyney dropped the radiogram, extended his hand to Hugh.

"Mr. Sheridan," he said solemnly, "providence has intervened to prevent me from doing you an injustice and condemning humanity to destruction! We'll find out where this Dercu and his Venusians are operating, destroy them! I'll contact the other governments of earth at once! Terrestrial civilization must organize at once, prepare to strike back!"

THE next few weeks were a sleepless delirium for Hugh. A thousand things, it seemed, demanded his attention. Interviews with War Department scientists to determine some method of combating super-gravity. The few high-powered rocket planes able to fly sent on scouting expeditions, their reports checked. Naval units also were engaged in the search for the base of the Venusians and a force of tanks, mobile artillery, was assembled on high land near Cumberland, ready to strike the moment that base was found.

Meanwhile the bits of news that filtered into the half-submerged Washington area told of an unbroken chain of disasters. Fierce humid heat, killing millions, filling the air with steaming blinding fogs; continued shortage of food, structural break-down due to the terrible gravity; torrential rains, undermining buildings, transforming formerly prosperous farm lands into trackless bogs, vast marshes in which quick-sprouting, enormous growths took root until they appeared as primeval jungles unknown to earth since the hot, damp days of the Mesozoic era. Floods, as the ice-caps melted, submerged lowlands, aiding in the creation of the immense morasses that swallowed up man and his works like some ravenous monster. New Orleans, Tampa, Galveston, lost in the blanket of fog, their populations starving, dying from heat and the survivors wandering in savage bands through the misty quagmires in search of food weighed down by super-gravity, gasping for breath.

Strange, wild stories emanated from the spreading swamp areas. Whole cities sucked into the bog, fantastic giant reptiles seen by delirious fugitives, looming through the fog, floods of boiling water scalding everyone in their path to agonizing death.

In the still liveable portions of the globe self-appointed messiahs preached of the new vengeance sent by a wrathful God to destroy wicked, presumptuous mankind. Frantic, fear-stricken millions straggled toward the mountains, pathetic remnants of household goods on their backs. Famine, pestilence, strode in the wake of the refugees and the veneer of civilization cracked to reveal primitive savagery, animalistic passions. Like beasts they fought for places aboard the rocket ships . . . ships that were unable to take even a fraction of the surviving millions to the sanctuary of other planets.

On January twentieth, two weeks after the final evacuation of Washington, Hugh Sheridan paced the radio shack of the Cumberland army post with dragging, gravity-weighted footsteps. Through the window he could see the rolling billows of fog, dripping ceaseless rain upon the valley below; occasionally, as the fetid mists parted, tangled vines, dense vegetation of enor-

mous size showed lush green above the red clay swamps. The heat was stifling, one hundred and seventeen, according to the thermometer on the wall of the shack, and rising steadily. On the muddy, rain-soaked slopes of the mountains half-starved multitudes roamed, men, women, and children of all walks of life their faces dull with despair, pinched from starvation.

WITH a weary frown Hugh turned from the window, spoke to the operator hunched over the radio set.

"Any news?"

"Nothing but the usual stuff." The radio man wiped a sweaty forehead. "Death toll in U. S. now fifty millions . . . South America silent . . . earth still nearing sun . . . What the hell? Our planes'll never locate that blasted Venusian base! Might be anywhere. Underground, maybe. We . . ." He broke off, adjusting his headphones. "Damn the static! Sounds like it's for you, Sheridan!" His pencil scratched on the pad before him.

Hugh bent, watched the words leap upon the paper.

"Hugh Sheridan, Cumberland Army Post, Cumberland, Md. Dad and I have gone to summer camp in Ozarks. Believe we have located hiding place of Dercu. Follow radio beam, call letter K-3, and come at once. Carole."

"Believe we have located . . . Good God!" Hugh whirled about. "Wilson! Go tell Colonel James to get me a plane ready at once! I'm heading west! And follow with all available forces!"

CHAPTER IV

THE flight from Cumberland to the Ozarks was a ghostly nightmare. Clouds, fog, on every hand, with only the faint radio beam for guidance. Now and then Hugh could catch glimpses of the land beneath, an endless marsh, dotted by crumbling, undermined villages, half-buried by a riot of vegetation. Louisville was covered by foaming yellow waves, an enormously swollen Ohio, bearing on its surface debris of every sort, houses, fences, furniture . . . and countless bloated bodies. Everywhere, it seemed, there was only the holocaust of destruction demolishing in a few short months the work of centuries. A new world for the men of Venus to take over . . .

Hugh, at the controls, was weak from the heat, the dragging gravity. He felt as though he breathed the air in lumps. The plane, superpowered to counteract the new gravitational force, roared a coughing complaint as its overtaxed motors fought to keep it aloft. The sun was reddening the mist on the horizon when he at last reached the Ozarks.

The Wordens' summer camp proved to be a rustic lodge, half-covered with wild tangles of vines, on the edge of an ever-increasing mountain lake. Swooping down through the fog, he landed on the beach.

He had barely climbed from the plane before he saw Carole and Dr. Worden ploughing through the mud toward him.

"Carole!" He clasped the girl's hand, then turned to her father. "How are you, sir? Your message . . ."

"Yes. Come inside and I'll explain." Dr. Worden led the way into the house. On a table in the center of the living room was a radio set.

"Hugh," Dr. Worden said somberly. "I told you in my message that I thought I could locate the terrestrial base of the Venusians. This is the device I have used, a simple television set with only a few minor refinements. As you know, normal radio reception is often marred by interference. A hospital x-ray machine, for instance, will

cause such static. After the power failure at New York I constructed an old-fashioned battery set, to listen to the reports from other sections of the earth. I noticed at that time considerable static. When New York was flooded we loaded up with canned food, came here. I brought the set with me to maintain contact with the outside world. As we progressed west I noticed that the static increased. Now . . . well, look!"

Dr. Worden snapped on the radio. A crackling blast of static filled the room and the television screen was a blur of dancing dots.

"I noticed that, following your beam," Hugh S h e r i d a n murmured. "But . . ."

"Remember the outpouring of energy in the form of rays that was set up by your gravity generator? Rays covering the entire spectrum? Suppose they cause this interference? I've been using this set as a detector, carrying it about the hills with me, measuring the volume of static with especially constructed instruments. And I've located the center of the disturbance in a wild uninhabitated area only forty miles from here!"

"Forty miles from here!" Hugh's voice rose excitedly. "It must be them! Wild desolate country where they could work undisturbed. Ideal as a center for Dercu and his followers!"

"Of course," Carole broke in, "we've no proof other than the static. But if we could i n v e s t i g a t e and make sure . . ."

"Right!" Hugh set his jaw grimly. "I've a plane outside . . ."

"No good." The girl shook her head. "The Venusians could spot that by the roar of the rockets, shoot it down. Better to go on foot. Get in touch with army headquarters by radio, tell them what we plan to do! Come on, Dad! We'll pack up some supplies!"

THE journey through the rain-swept mountains was an odyssey of toil. Weighed down by super-gravity, exhausted by the terrible, sweltering heat, they stumbled along, forcing themselves forward by sheer effort of will.

Clouds of steam rose from the muddy slopes, and the great masses of vegetation formed barriers to their progress. A jungle, it seemed, hardly recognizable as earth. The Venusians had only to transplant their own particular flora and fauna, cover sections of the marshland with the great fibroid mats upon which their sprawling cities were built. Another month's progress toward the sun would bring such heat as to stamp out all human life except for small areas about the poles and these could be easily destroyed by the rocket fleets of Venus. Mankind, faced with extinction . . .

Hugh, in the lead, was plunging hopelessly onward when he suddenly noticed that the footing was growing firmer, that they were emerging from the dark shadows of the overgrowth into a cleared plain. Wearily he raised his head . . . and then froze in his tracks.

Before them lay a rocky plateau, free of mud, of vegetation. In the center of the plateau a grey granite peak thrust skyward, ominous, menacing, looming like a clumsy giant through the mists. And on the highest pinnacle of the mountain two burnished towers gleamed dully . . . two towers of odd design, connected by a tube of glass that glowed like white lightning.

"Look!" Hugh pointed toward the peak, his eyes triumphant.

"Dercu's base!" Mr. Worden panted. "Must be! No towers like those were ever built by terrestrials! Come on! We've got to go back, contact army headquarters . . ." His voice trailed off into a gasp of horror.

Coming toward them across the

plateau were a half-dozen powerful broadshouldered figures, figures with dark, scaly skin, bulging eyes, thick reptilian lips . . . evil, alien, savage. Oblivious to the heavy gravity they raced forward, heavily-charged shock-sticks in their hands.

"Venusians!" Hugh snatched his atomite gun from its holster. "Try to get away . . . tell earth . . ." Raising the gun, he fired.

The tiny projectile struck the first of their assailants with a shattering roar, a flash of flame. The Venusian collapsed, a mangled mass of flesh. Again Hugh fired, and another of his opponents went down.

The remaining Venusians were close now, waving their heavily-charged whips. Carole and Dr. Worden went down before the electric lashes, shocked into unconsciousness. Desperate, Hugh whirled, attempted to fire once more. Too late. Before he could squeeze the trigger, one of the hissing lashes wrapped about his body. He had but a moment's glimpse of the grinning face of the Venusian before the world went black.

The deep roar of machinery, the whisper of queer sibilant voices was Hugh's first indication of returning consciousness. Feebly he rolled over, propped himself on one elbow.

HE was, it seemed, in a cavern of some sort. Round columns of green glass supported its high, arched roof, and the whole vast grotto was lit by a pale, purplish light. Engines . . . tremendous, whirling generators . . . hummed a song of power. Huge compressors towered above, vanishing at length into the dim shadows of the roof. Vacuum pumps from an adjoining discharge room thumped steadily, and a maze of tubes, glowing with their streams of protons, made a luminous spider-web over the inferno of roaring machinery. Hugh was beginning to believe it a wild delirium when he heard Carole's voice.

"Hugh! You . . . you're all right?"

"All right," he echoed, twisting about. Mr. Worden and Carole lay behind him pale, huddled limply on the floor. "And you?"

Before the girl could answer, crisp footsteps rang on the rocky floor and a squat, powerful figure loomed through the shadowy half-light. Dercu, no longer enveloped in his asbestos suit, stared in surprise at his captives.

"Quite a coincidence!" he murmured softly. "Dr. Worden, his charming daughter, and our thick-skulled young inventor. You will note, Mr. Sheridan, how we have improved upon your original generator. The entire mass of this mountain above us forms one 'magnet' while the earth below forms the other. By cutting these lines of gravitational force we have a tremendous source of gravity. Then, too, we have perfected an immense oscillating system. Just as electromagnetic waves set up a current in any tuned receiver so our waves of gravitational force, tuned to the receiving pitch of rocky, ferric, sub-strata, permeate the entire earth. Thus our receiver the world itself, sets up protonic motion accompanied by an increased gravitational field. Within a few months Terra will have taken up its new orbit about the sun, human life will be extinct and our new companion planet, no longer cold and arid will be ready for colonization! Reflect on the magnitude of it, Mr. Sheridan! What man before has accomplished so stupendous a feat as the stealing of a world?"

"Horrible!" Carole shuddered. "You Venusians have a planet of your own, larger than earth. Why must you destroy our civilization?"

"Nature is merciless." Dercu's jewel-bright eyes blinked coldly. "If

you terrestrials were to find some means of obtaining Venus for a colony, you would surely do so. Earth itself, with its ceaseless warring, its greedy nations and races, sets us our example. Better to wipe out such a disorganized, predatory civilization, replace it with the machine-like, well-disciplined life of Venus. Moreover, we need metals, so scarce on our own planet and so expensive to transport in bulk. If, as a result, mankind must be wiped out, we are sorry . . . but powerless to stop the march of our progress!" Dercu paused, drew an exultant breath. "You, Mr. Sheridan, and your two companions, will be spared, for the mind that gave us the gravity generator should be preserved for future scientific work. When Earth has been colonized, we will attempt to capture the other planets! Mars, Saturn, perhaps, even mighty Jupiter . . . !" he broke off as another dark-skinned Venusian stepped forward, spoke in swift, liquid monosyllables, gesticulating excitedly. Then Dercu turned to the captives, his lips drawn back in a sardonic smile.

"I have just been told," he murmured, "that the armed forces of this continent are advancing toward our base here. Perhaps some of our sentries were careless enough to allow themselves to be seen from the air. Not that it matters . . ."

"The American expeditionary force!" Dr. Worden cried. "Their planes must have spotted this place! As soon as they get their bombers, their artillery, into action . . ."

The Venusian gave a soft, bubbling laugh.

"Come," he said. "There are television screens in the control room. You will see your army's . . . triumph!"

Silently the three prisoners followed their squat captor to a large circular chamber lined with instrument panels, with dials, gauges, and curiously shaped copper levers. A huge television screen crossed one end of the room.

"The control room. Here from that master-switch we control the gravity of earth." Dercu smiled blandly as Hugh darted a quick look at the great lever. "Any attempts to lessen the earth's gravity would be futile." He touched the atomite gun at his waist. "Perhaps, assuming you were in some way to overcome me, you might shut off the machines for a few moments. But even so, others of our forces would come here at once, dispose of you, reset the controls at the desired position. Such attempts would only cost you your lives. But now, let us see what your armies are doing." Dercu reached out, touched a button on the switchboard.

At once the great screen leaped into life. Through the dancing blur of static they could see the plateau that surrounded the mountain, rocky, barren, cloaked in swirling, ghostly mists. Emerging from the wet green jungle beyond were tiny figures, khaki-clad infantry, thousands of them, accompanied by rumbling tanks, batteries of atomite guns. Overhead, squadrons of high-powered bombers droned like a swarm of angry hornets.

"Quite an imposing array." Dercu nodded calmly. "They should, I believe, attack soon. The bombers first, of course." He bent, turned a dial. "We are, however, prepared. In addition to our larger units, we have smaller ones so placed as to create a ring of extreme gravitational force about this mountain. Watch!"

With horrified fascination the three captives watched the screen. The planes were diving, now, hawklike, their rockets blazing. In another moment they would release the cargo of deadly bombs, blast the mountain fastness into a heap of rubble . . .

Carole, her eyes fixed on the screen, gave a quick gasp of horror. The planes

were not coming out of their dive! Down, down, they swooped, as though in the grip of some mighty maelstrom. Tiny figures within their cockpits were rigid, unable to move. A thousand feet, five hundred. . . .

A SHATTERING roar shook the plateau. Their bombs exploding as they crashed, the planes disappeared in a cloud of smoke!

"Horrible, horrible!" Mr. Worden whispered. "It's murder!"

"You complain because I save you from being blown to bits?" Dercu laughed, busy with his controls. "We do well to rid Terra of such fools!"

Hugh turned his gaze to the blurred screen once more. Through the veil of rain he could see weary, gravity-weighted infantry, scattered in skirmishing order, moving toward them.

"Now!" Dercu's horny fingers reached toward the control panel.

Hugh stared at the screen, aghast. The heavy tanks had suddenly stopped, the onrushing soldiers staggered, as though striking an invisible wall. All at once, as Dercu turned the dial, they collapsed, fell sprawling to earth. Sucked down by the terrible force, they were powerless to move.

"Oh!" Carole drew a sharp, agonized breath. "You . . . you intend to keep them all captives?"

"Captives?" The man from Venus seemed surprised. "But they are dead! Quite dead! Look . . . I shut off the zone about the mountain. Do you see them arise? Would you be alive if a ton of lead were placed upon your chest? Perhaps, if you need further conviction, I can increase the televisor's power, show you close-ups . . ."

"No! No!" The girl placed her hands over her eyes. "Oh, Hugh! Dad! Isn't there anything we can do? Earth being destroyed! Humanity wiped out!"

"You can do nothing!" The Venusian's voice was exultant.

As he spoke, Hugh tenses his muscles. Impossible to overcome the powerful, well-armed Venusian but . . . Earth was doomed anyhow, he reflected. Perhaps what he contemplated would hasten that doom, crush the last vestige of human life that remained. Or perhaps . . .

Swiftly he leaped, crossing the room in a single bound. With grasping, eager fingers he reached for the great master switch.

"Fool!" Dercu snatched the heavy gun from his belt. "For this you die!" Gripping the gun, he swung to face the terrestrial.

At that instant Hugh yanked the lever with all his strength, pulling it toward him as far as it would go. Not to lighten the world's gravity . . . but to increase it!

WITH the moment Hugh pulled that lever there commenced what the world was later to remember as the "awful minute," the culmination of all the terrors that had beset humanity. For one awful minute buildings collapsed, trees crackled to earth, and mankind, caught in the grip of supernal forces, gasped out its dying breath, crushed, helpless, on the verge of extinction. Had it lasted another twenty seconds . . .

In the great cavern Hugh and his companions fell to the floor, choking, hearts fighting to continue breathing. Even the Venusian, accustomed as he was to strong gravity, lay inert upon the the floor, groaning.

Too late now to reverse the lever, even if he wanted to. Hugh was pinned to the floor, helpless. Impossible to draw a breath . . . a black mist was forming before his eyes, and his ribs seemed about to give way. As in a dream he saw the glass pillars that sup-

ported the roof crack, start to crumble, felt a tremor shake the mountain. Dimly from the caverns below he heard an ominous rumbling, the crash and thunder of falling rock.

And then suddenly the terrible pressure was lifted. Hundreds of pounds of weight seemed lifted from his chest. Even the false gravity of the Venusians had disappeared. Earth had returned to normal!

Dazedly Hugh staggered to his feet, drew a sharp breath. Carole and her father were still lying sprawled upon the floor, half-buried by heaps of rubble. On all sides the pillars were splintering, falling to the floor, and the room rocked crazily, its walls opening in jagged fissures.

A croaking sound behind him drew Hugh's gaze. Dercu, bloody, dishevelled, had swayed to his knees; eyes glittering with fury, he raised the atomite gun once more. Before he could pull the trigger, however, a sharp crackling sound filled the cavern and a dark crevice appeared before him, widening rapidly. For just an instant Dercu teetered on the brink, his lips paled by horror. Then, with a scream of despair, he disappeared from view! The man who had stolen earth had been, by the mockery of fate, swallowed up by the world he stole!

As Dercu vanished, Hugh whirled about, frantic.

"Carole! Dr. Worden!" He dragged them erect. "Got to . . . get out of here! Quick! Cavern's collapsing!"

Groggily they nodded, followed him through the doorway. The elaborate system of underground grottos, weakened by that moment of titanic gravity, was giving way! Blindly they raced through the shadowy tunnels, in a rain of falling rock, hoping to reach some outlet. Suddenly they were in the immense power-plants, running through heaps of debris, shattered glass. Huge boulders, torn from the ceiling by the terrible gravitational forces, had wrecked the generators, reduced the machines to masses of twisted metal and torn wire. A few mangled corpses, the remains of the band of Venusian scientists, lay sprawling amid the wreckage.

"Which way?" Carole gasped, glancing feverishly about.

"Here!" Hugh motioned toward a passage at the end of which daylight gleamed.

AS they sprang toward it, a deep roar shook the cavern. Dr. Worden had barely time to enter the corridor before a wall of rock, grinding slowly across the cavern's floor, buried the spot on which they had stood a moment before. Dazed, breathless, they staggered along the corridor.

Suddenly they were blinking in the pale sunlight, stumbling across the plain at the foot of the mountain.

"Look!" Dr. Worden turned, pointed to the rocky peak behind them.

The mountain was shaking like an aroused giant. A great landslide, tons of earth and stone, swept down its slopes, and in another instant the mouth of the tunnel was sealed.

"Gone!" Carole whispered. "The gravity generator lost forever! Unless you reveal the secret . . ."

Hugh stared at the steamy mist, the green marshy jungles beyond. Relieved of super-gravity, the earth would be circling outward again, seeking its old orbit. Soon the terrible heat would disappear, the polar caps freeze up once more. But years must elapse before mankind recovered from the staggering blow to its progress inflicted by super-gravity. Hugh shook his head.

"Lost . . . forever!" he repeated firmly, and his arm tightened possessively about the girl's slender shoulders.

BEYOND HELL

by R. DeWITT MILLER

Author of "Hour of Judgment," etc.

They wiped war from the earth in a week. Not a battleship floated, not a gun worked, not a warplane was able to fly

NIGHT and four thousand years brooded over the limestone quarry. Not since the civilization of Crete had perished in one red night had that quarry been used.

But Professor Rod Norton was not concerned with the ghostly beauty of the jumbled limestone blocks which reared grotesque shapes into the moonlight. His attention was concentrated on a newly turned mound of dirt at the foot of the north wall. For a month he had superintended the digging of that trench. And late the day before he had found something—something that had made him discharge his native laborers and send a hurry call for the only other person in the world to whom that trench meant anything.

Carefully shielding his flashlight, he lowered himself into the end of the trench, and called to the figure behind him.

"Go easy, Joan." He meant it to be

STARTLING NOVEL OF A SUPER-SCIENTIST WHO GAINED THE POWER AND SO

He who possesses It, possesses all. But what was "all," and what ghastly monsters might Rod and Joan become when The Power was wholly theirs?

casual, but it didn't sound that way.

Rod's wife slipped noiselessly between two gigantic blocks, and then jumped down beside him. She stood with her slim figure silhouetted against the moonlight. Her soft voice carried a gayness that seemed strange in that weird place.

"Comes it now the explanation of your frantic wire?"

Rod cupped the flashlight in his hands, until it shot only a thin needle of light.

"There it is," he whispered, "at the base of the wall."

For an instant her voice was out of control:

"The passage—then it's really true—oh, darling, we've been right—and I'd just about given up hoping."

"Yes," he said. "We've been right. Ever since I first thought I had the key to the Cretan language, I've known that if I could only find this place, I'd have

made one of the biggest discoveries in archeological history. You see, I've known since the first that this place was the center, the . . ."

"Don't stop to make speeches when there's adventure ahead."

Rod smiled, and directed the beam of the flashlight towards a rectangular opening in the wall of the quarry.

The top and sides of the hole were smooth and obviously cut by machinery. Even after forty centuries, the angles of the tunnel were still true and sharp. The lower part of the tunnel was blocked with loose dirt, but enough had been removed to allow a person to crawl into the thick darkness beyond.

"Your last calculations were right," Rod whispered. "I can see now why we had trouble before. That broken tablet we deciphered didn't go in much for geographical accuracy."

"I know," she agreed. "I've been doing some more work on that tablet. Most of all I've been trying to make some sense out of that last sentence. But it's no use. I haven't been able to improve our translation."

HE quoted from memory: *"All power is there. He who possesses it, possesses all. For each of us has given to The Thing.* That's the one, isn't it?"

She nodded.

"Funny, though," she went on, half to herself, "how we haven't been able to get a translation for that last word Just calling it *The Thing* is like making up words to fill crossword puzzles."

"Maybe," he suggested, "our language hasn't any word-concept for whatever the Cretans meant by that word. According to your ideas, the Cretan civilization was far higher than most people believe. Perhaps even as high as ours."

"Still determined to give our civilization top rating," Joan declared pointedly. "Didn't it ever occur to you that there might be another kind of civilization — a civilization that wasn't so darned interested in material things.

"How about a civilization that considered the things of the mind of primary importance, that put thought energy above physical energy—or did it ever dawn on you that thought might be a kind of energy—besides . . ."

"Weren't you saying something a moment ago about cutting down on the oratory—now let's declare an armistice as far as theory goes—and see what a little good old scientific observation will do."

He knelt in the trench and shot the beam of the flashlight into the opening. Suddenly, Joan caught his arm.

"Don't you think we'd better wait until morning? The passage may be blocked somewhere."

Rod shook his head.

"We don't dare wait. The government here has been getting more hostile to my work every day. Besides, the native workmen are superstitious about this place. I didn't dare wait a minute after I found the tunnel entrance. That's why I sent for you and told you to keep your trip a secret. I didn't like to pull you away from the research end of the work until you'd finished the new tablets, but I couldn't wait. We can't wait now."

She was silent a moment, her eyes fixed on the puddle of yellow light which the flashlight cast on the floor of the passage. At last she looked up.

As always when he looked into his wife's eyes, Rod had the feeling that she was laughing to herself, a gay, friendly little laugh at some private joke. It was always there, in the depths of those gray eyes—an eternal spark of laughter.

"My darling," she said very softly, "have I ever held you back from anything you wanted? When I said that I

would go through life with you, I meant just that. For where you go, I go also —and what you face, I face with you— and what is your fate shall be mine . . . and now that I've talked like a Valentine, let's see what the heck's at the end of this passage."

Holding the light in front of him, Rod crawled through the entrance to the tunnel. The dirt and broken rock extended for perhaps a yard, then it slanted downward for a few feet. Beyond this his light showed a cleanly cut passageway, slightly higher than a man, and with sides he could just touch with his outstretched hands. He turned the light on the entrance and called to Joan.

"It's just as we figured. The opening of the tunnel was originally at the base of the quarry wall, but after they quit using the quarry, it filled up with rubble until the entrance was blocked."

Joan inched her way head first through the opening, lost her balance, and rolled down the pile of dirt. She got up laughing. The laugh ran into the blackness of the tunnel and returned, but all the mirth seemed to have been filtered out of it.

ROD was on his knees, carefully examining the earth and rock which blocked the entrance. At last he straightened, satisfied.

"I think we were pretty right all along. You know, we thought that the Cretans probably stored something here that was essential to their civilization. They probably put some sort of curse or taboo on it to protect it from the superstitious barbarians who lived on the mainland."

"And the barbarians probably found it after they captured the Cretan city of Knossos," Joan picked up the thread of the idea. "After they burned the city, and killed the Cretans, they must have come to search for treasure, or whatever is inside."

"Not quite right," Rod declared. "On a quick examination, it looks as if they tried to block up that passage with rocks, but didn't do a very good job of it. The gradual filling of the quarry finished it for them."

They started down the tunnel, their footsteps wandering up and down like lonely ghosts searching for the feet that made them.

"But why should the barbarians have closed up the entrance? You would have thought they'd have wanted whatever was inside. It doesn't make sense. Unless a few of the Cretans reached here and barricaded themselves. But that doesn't work, either. Our whole theory is based on the idea that the Cretans were surprised by the attack, that they couldn't collect their power in time. Everything in the ruins of Knossos points to that."

But Rod wasn't listening. He was staring at something just in front of them on the passage floor. Joan came up beside him. The rays of the flashlight lanced through a white framework of bones. Joan shrank away with a little cry.

"Don't worry," Rod reassured her. "This fellow's long past bothering anybody." He reached down and touched one of the white tokens of life long gone. It crumbled into powder. "Only the climate saved them this long," he muttered, "but they're undoubtedly human. Look, what's this?"

From among the bones that must once have been a chest, he took a bit of pointed stone. In the light it gleamed with the black, greasy luster of obsidium. It had evidently been chipped to form a crude spear head.

"There's part of the answer to the questions you've been throwing yourself," he said. "This fellow must have been trying to get down the passageway when a spear caught him from behind."

"Then the barbarians must have

trailed the Cretans here," she cried. "But if they did that, why didn't they go on in and steal whatever it was that the Cretans prized so much? And why did they block the passage and leave this man's body where it fell. Rod, it's as if they were afraid of this place."

"People are always afraid of what they don't understand. That's what keeps old tales and legends going. This island is full of them. The stories of the Labyrinth and the Minetaur originated here."

"Phooey on legends when we can find out the truth," she declared. "Let's not stand here and talk until we're as permanent as this fellow."

THEY stepped over the evidence of the case which time had closed four thousand years before, and went on down the tunnel. The flashlight pried into the darkness ahead, the blackness solidifying again behind them.

The tunnel slanted downward, ever deeper into the cliff. As they walked, Rod constantly examined the smooth featureless walls. But they revealed only the superb technical skill of the Cretan architects. No inscription or ornamentation broke the limestone surfaces. The endless walls slipping by gave him a queer feeling that time was reeling past them, the featureless sweep of the centuries since human feet had traversed this road into the holy of holies of a civilization.

A sudden clipped word from Joan brought him back to reality.

"Light."

A ghostly wisp of illumination, just on the borderline of visibility, struggled with the darkness far ahead. Rod snapped off the flashlight. As the blackness rushed in on them, the light ahead showed brighter. It had no form or shape, just a bit of light—*where all should have been dark.*

"Rod, turn on the flashlight."

The flood of sane, ordinary illumination was a relief.

"Nothing surprising," he said reassuringly. "There's probably another opening or an air vent ahead."

But he didn't believe it. The tunnel had been tending steadily *downward.* And there was nothing below them but the center of the earth. He tried to convince himself that the Cretans might have bored a deep ventilation shaft from the ground above, but somehow it wouldn't jell.

It all came back to the fact that there was one way to find out, the only way there was of finding out anything—go and look at it. Again he shook himself free from the vague feeling of fear, and started on down the passage, Joan close behind him.

The light steadily increased. After perhaps a hundred yards he was able to turn off the flashlight. The strange light was ample for them to see their way.

A right angle turn ended the passage. The light came from around this corner, and flooded out into the tunnel. They could see now that the light was not white, but a warm rose, which softened the severe coldness of the limestone, and made it appear to glow with a pleasant radiance of its own.

There was something indescribably lovely about the light. It carried a promise of nameless beauty around that corner. Rod called to Joan and began to run.

He was almost to the turn when he was stopped—*by nothingness.*

HIS terrified eyes searched about him for some physical presence. The tunnel was empty except for Joan running towards him. But something was there, something that closed about him with chill arms, that filled his brain with red mists of horror. It was name-

less, spaceless, a black thing out of the pit, a hideous compound of fear and hate that stirred every dark terror in his mind.

He screamed, a wild, hysterical scream of animal terror. He tried to drive paralyzed legs to return to Joan, but at that instant he caught sight of her face. It was convulsed into something inhuman. Her screams filled the tunnel, echoing and re-echoing until it seemed every fiend of hell was dancing in that passage.

Still Rod fought blindly against the unseen force that was toppling his reason. He clawed the air and struck out at the walls. But the thing was not born of dimension which could be contained in walls. It was of the mind alone.

His brain was a screaming tumult of every horrible emotion that the human race had ever known. But, rising above all, was a towering black demon composed of the accumulated terror of mankind.

Wave after wave of pure terror, stripped of every buffer which human beings had built up, drove his reason relentlessly from its post.

Without even waiting to pull the main switch of consciousness, his mind slunk away, leaving less than human things to chatter and drool where thought and order had once ruled. They jibbered and screeched in the place where Rod Norton, human being, had held sway.

And ever taller and taller, out of the subconscious mists, rose the phantom of fear, the overlord of the realm of the beasts. Every terror which human beings had put behind them when they fought up from the prehistoric forests was born again.

The animal that now ruled him turned him towards the entrance to the tunnel and forced his legs to move. He staggered back, seeking only to escape.

Then suddenly he saw Joan, where she had collapsed to the floor. The sight of her tortured face stirred some half dead thing cringing in a corner of his fear-ruled brain. Like a faint, far voice, memory pleaded against the tumult of terror that he loved this woman, that a moment before he would have given his life for her, that he was in a safe, empty passage surrounded only by memories of a civilization dead forty centuries.

It was only a flash, a swift moment of reason before the fear closed in again, but in that instant he flung himself towards Joan. His hands fumbled for her body—and then black terror swept over him again.

Run! Run! Escape! He was governed only by the instinct of flight.

He cast one glance towards the end of the tunnel with its warm rose glow, and saw that way was closed. Every nameless thing that ever haunted living things was there. The gates of his subconscious mind swung wide and dark hordes poured out to join the dimensionless terrors before him.

Icy fingers clawed at him, formless talons dug into his mind. Writhing dark arms reached out for him. Run! Back down the tunnel! Escape! Go! Anywhere! Run!

BUT as he took his first terror-driven step, his foot struck Joan's body. He staggered, struggling frantically to keep his balance, and fell around the corner—down into the darkness and the talons of the clutching phantoms.

Fear intensified to the ultimate seared into his mind. And then . . .

Warm, friendly rose light flooded about him. The last trace of that evil horror which dwelt in the passage was swept from his mind. His brain was clear and quiet. Reason was at its post again, steadily guiding his actions.

He got up and glanced about. Be-

fore him stretched a vast room whose walls were of the same white limestone as the tunnel. There was the same precise architecture, the same simplicity. In the center of the room was a strange something, from which came the rose light.

Suddenly his attention was jerked back to the passage. Scream after scream echoed from behind him. Joan! Still out there in that empty tunnel that was filled with something more powerful than the might of armies!

He stepped to the entrance and looked out. The turn in the passage was a scant yard from the room. Joan had fallen forward. She was writhing and screaming on the floor, her hands thrown out in front of her.

The memory of that black horror closed chill fingers about him. He wrenched his mind free, and dove back into the passage. Instantly the formless shapes rose again out of the pit, the screaming ghouls clutched at him.

For a fleeting second he held back the overpowering fear, and closed his arms around Joan. Then he stumbled towards the clear light of the room. They fell together across the invisible line.

As before, the screaming fear vanished as soon as he was in the room. He helped Joan to her feet. For a long time they stood with their arms tight about each other. At last Joan said:

"What—what was it?"

"Hell on earth—or a pretty good imitation."

She shuddered and turned her eyes away from the entrance.

"But that doesn't explain it."

"I'm not worrying about that," he declared with a wry smile. "Besides I don't think the explanation for that has been invented yet."

"Whatever it was," she said pointedly, "it was put there for a purpose. It was meant to guard this room—and it did it."

"Your logic isn't very good. That passage was empty. Nobody *put* anything there."

"It was empty of material things, yes. At least in the way we mean material. But what if the Cretan science were of the mind alone? I think some day we'll find that fear is a real thing, only it's just beyond the dimensions we call reality. Remember how the Egyptian curses have killed every man who entered the tombs.

"Perhaps haunted houses are merely filled with fear that some one has left there. Ever since science proved telepathy, three dimensions haven't been big enough. Yes, I think people could put a wall of fear in a passage—if they knew how."

"I rather imagine it would take a lot of knowing," Rod said skeptically. "But I think we'd better leave the theorizing until after we get out of here. In the meantime, let's look around."

THE room was perhaps two hundred feet long, and half as broad. The ceiling was vaulted, giving a stately, classical balance to the hall. Rod felt somehow that here was that ultimate simplification which is perfection. The proportions of the room made it seem like a parthenon cut out of the limestone heart of a cliff.

Like the passageway, the room was featureless. The whole effect focussed all attention on the thing in the middle. No man ever born could stand in that room without being drawn to the inscrutable bit of almost childish mechanism in the center.

On top of a limestone pillar perhaps ten feet tall was a small dome of glass, looking oddly like the cover of a microscope. Inside this was a disk of some polished metal, resembling nickel, which rotated steadily.

That was all. Rod stared at it, try-

ing to understand why a people should bore deep into the earth and build a giant room whose proportions were flawless—to house a foolish little gadget no more startling than a radiometer in a high school physics lab.

"What keeps it going?" Joan asked.

Rod started to answer, and stopped. For the first time it dawned on him that the disk had been whirling there for four thousand years without any apparent source of power. He walked slowly around the column, but all sides were identical, and as uncommunicative as the walls of the room.

"There may be some source of power coming up through the column—possibly from radium. That's about the only thing that would last this long."

"That might explain that light, too," Joan agreed.

Rod hadn't paid much attention to the light before. The light came from the disk, and yet didn't come from it. It was in and around the pillar, a vague cloud of luminescence that was as intangible as space, and yet lighted the entire room with the warm rose glow.

He put his hand into the glow, and felt nothing. Then he attempted to jump high enough to touch the glass dome, but it was just out of reach. He tried to think of something to throw at it, but the crying emptiness of the room killed the thought at birth. The only thing that they had brought with them heavy enough to do any harm was the flashlight—and it was outside in the tunnel. He turned to Joan.

"I'll lift you on my shoulders, and you see what you can do with the damned thing."

She shook her head.

"No, Rod, that wouldn't get us anywhere. That must be what the strange word in the tablet referred to as *the thing*. It must have a meaning—as strange to us as that wall of fear—and we've got to find out what it is."

"First of all," Rod said slowly, "we've got to get out of here."

THEY stood silently staring at each other as realization became reality. There was no other entrance to the room save the one through which they had come. Those smooth limestone walls could contain no secret opening.

"Perhaps we could get back down the tunnel," Joan suggested with a matter of factness that didn't ring true.

"Maybe, but I don't see how." Rod too was trying to keep something out of his voice. "I only got through by chance. If I hadn't fallen over your body, I'd never have gotten through. That wall of fear—or whatever it is—seems to be several feet thick. If the passage were straight, I might be able to throw you through the invisible wall, but the right angle corner stops that. I guess they thought of that too."

"Could we fight our way through? Shield our minds somehow?"

"I've thought of that. It might work, but I'd only try it as a last resort. The thing makes an animal of you, an animal that wants to escape. I think you'll always tend to run back the way you came. The demons will always be in front of you. Besides, when the fear makes beasts of us, I'm afraid of what we might do to each other. Whoever created what's in that passage thought of every possibility."

"We agree on that point anyway."

"I—I don't know. Every sane idea I ever had has been blasted by this place."

She was silent a long time, then she said:

"The evil that men do lives after them."

"Shut up," he snapped, "don't say things like that. There must be a way out. If we don't show up tomorrow, people will look for us."

"But no one knows where we are. We

were so careful to keep this trip a secret. We left false directions every place we could. And we can make enough noise in here to wake the Cretan civilization, and no one could hear us."

"Eventually the workmen will tell the government officials, and they'll come to have a look at the passage."

"That may be days or weeks. And if the workmen are as suspicious as you say they are, they may never tell about it. And even if they do, how could anybody get by the wall of fear? Of course, they might blast that part of the passageway out, but that probably wouldn't do any good either. Remember that thing laughs at three dimensions."

Again silence closed in. When Rod couldn't stand it any longer, he began to pace back and forth the length of the great hall.

And in that perfectly meaningless room nothing else moved, save the inscrutable whirling disk. The ribbon of time rolled through his brain, off the spool of the past and on to the spool of the future, and that was all. Slowly another impression grew on him—that the walls were closing in on them—an inch in a year, ten feet in a century, until they reached the whirling disk, and left the limestone as it had been before time began its foolish marching through the brains of men—as foolish as the rotating bauble.

A little, choked cry came from behind him.

"Oh, God."

HE swung sharply about. Joan had crumpled to the floor. In the diabolical emptiness of the great room her small body lying there seemed a reason —shattering symbol of human helplessness.

Rod started to go to her, to raise her to her feet, and tell her that this was all a terrible dream. Then he stopped. What could he do? What could he tell her? Words of encouragement would echo about that bare room with ironical mockery.

There was nothing to do but wait for starvation, or for desperation to force them to make a hopeless attempt to get back down the passage.

Slowly Rod's eyes went back to the whirling disk. He knew suddenly that it controlled all this. The solution was there—in that silly, spinning toy. And he would make it give up an answer. He would tear it apart, and see the heart of this long vanished civilization. He would make it answer for this evil mockery.

He ran towards the pillar—and stopped. He couldn't reach the disk. He could never reach it. As far as he was concerned, it would whirl serenely forever in its glass dome.

And as the last physical weapon of the material world was stripped from him, he stood quietly and stared at *the thing,* his whole being focused on that bit of moving metal.

For a long time nothing happened. The world hurtled through space, his brain hurtled through time, the disk spun. The rose glow did not flicker. The whole vast room was as static as eternity.

Then it dawned on him that he had stood there watching the disk for many minutes—*without any reason.* He had not watched it because of hopeless dejection, nor through simple fascination. He had watched it because—because the disk had demanded to be watched.

And as that thought emerged from its chrysalis, he realized the significance of this seemingly meaningless room. All this mighty workmanship had been done to concentrate interest on that whirling bauble. The idea fitted the facts so perfectly that he felt as if some one had explained it to him.

That vast bare room, without any

ornamentation to catch the eye, that passage leading away from the tumult and distraction of the normal world, that solitary pillar, each was part of a plan that could have but one purpose—to focus the attention of any human being on that disk.

But why? What power could such a toy have, what significance, what could it symbolize?

Then inevitably his eyes went back to *the thing*.

Slowly an impression stole over him that the disk was speaking to him, "Look at me. Look, little bewildered man, and you shall see the answer. Be not afraid. It was for you that I was made."

He had no hallucination of an actual voice. Rather it was the feeling of a naked concept, utterly new to him, being clothed by his mind in a suitable raiment of words.

Gradually the room and the circumstances of his entry into it were pushed to the edge of his consciousness. The disk filled his brain. His mind was centered on that inscrutable mechanism with an intensity of concentration such as no human brain had known for four thousand years.

THEN slowly the disk itself faded, its purpose finished. In that moment he realized that this whirling toy was nothing in itself, that it was only the door out of a three dimensional world. As a psychic's crystal ball, or a hypnotist's ring, it had concentrated his attention until his mind had become a white hot spear of consciousness which could pierce the walls of space-time and contact forces that lay beyond.

There was nothing in his mind now but a gray swirling mist, in the center of which was a brilliant point of light where the disk had been. All that remained was the last push. The whole strange psychological mechanism of a vanished civilization had narrowed his world to a single point of formless light on the edge of the known dimensions.

The rest he must do himself. He understood that perfectly. His mind was following a path of thought worn deep by the brains of the race who had built this door beyond the known dimensions. The accumulated race memory of all the men and women who had stood before the same door urged him on.

Relentlessly he drove his mind towards the glowing spot. The lash of his will forced his stumbling consciousness forward. The gray mist was seething with forces which lay beyond it. The spot of light had burst into a whirlpool of unbearable brilliance. On—on—through the thin gray mist which alone separated him from another world.

And suddenly he was there.

Forces for which his mind had no concept swirled about him, the enigmas of a three dimensional world seemed stupid misunderstandings. And about him, pouring into his mind, was POWER, power such as beings of the three dimensional world only glimpsed in fleeting psychic moments.

Then it was all gone. He was standing in the great room, staring at the whirling disk. Nothing had changed—except his brain.

He first realized it when he began thinking of the problem of escape. It was only then he understood that his brain would never again be as the brains of other men. His thoughts darted through his mind with a swiftness that made his old mental processes seem crude carryovers from the stone age of thought.

Ideas linked instantly, memory answered any command. Every mental function was speeded unbelievably. Power surged through his consciousness. What he wanted he would get. If these walls were in his way, he would

walk through them.

He knelt swiftly, raised Joan to her feet, and turned her agonized face towards the disk. His low voice seemed too big for the great hall.

"Look at it!"

"But, Rod . . ."

"Look at it—keep looking. Let it get hold of you."

She did not question him. Instinctively he knew that men and women would forever after obey him without question, that he possessed in full what the great leaders of the world had only possessed in part.

AS the moments slipped away, Joan became tense, her eyes never moving from the disk. He knew what was happening, knew that she would be strong enough for the last push, when the disk had finished its job. She could go that last terrible mile which she must travel alone; she would not waver in that instant when even the disk faded into nothingness. She, whom he had loved as truly as a man could love a woman, would not be forever separated from him by this thing which dwelt behind that whirling toy. She would make it through—she must, she must . . .

Then suddenly the rose glow flickered and dimmed—and Joan turned from the disk and stared at him with strange, glowing eyes, eyes that were first unbelieving, then half understanding, then laughing . . .

"Now you have it, too," he whispered.

"Yes," she said quietly. "I have it. I have power above all other men and women, but you. I don't understand it. But I have it."

"Think," he said, "think with your brain that has been born again."

He smiled at her startled look. She too was having her first experience with a brain whose tempo had been unbelievably speeded.

"They put it there," she said slowly. "The disk was just the door to their storehouse of power, only it wasn't power in three dimensions. It was the fundamental energy that is behind the world."

"Exactly. Remember the tablet said, *Each of us has given to The Thing.* Every Cretan must have come into this room before he died and concentrated on that disk. Then he willed something of his power into the superdimensional reservoir which the disk created.

"The great people gave much, the small people gave only a little, but a vast well of fundamental energy was built up just on the other side of our three dimensions. The disk formed the point of contact. The Cretans were building up that power against the day when it would be needed. Only the barbarians attacked so swiftly that the Cretans couldn't reach this room. One of them almost did, and a spear caught him while he was in the passage.

"How the barbarians managed to make the attack we don't know. Maybe the Cretans were so sure of themselves they got careless. Maybe it was just chance. Maybe some one in their own ranks betrayed them. Over refinement, intermarriage, and racial decay may have had a lot to do with it. It's done the same to other civilizations. Anyway, we'll never know."

While they had been talking they had walked across the room to the entrance. He gave a last look at the disk, and started down the passage. She followed him. He picked up the flashlight and shot its rays ahead.

"The wall of fear," she said softly, "isn't here any more."

"It isn't here for us," he corrected her. "It probably didn't affect the Cretans either. I think it's only effective against people whose lives belong to the three dimensional world—like the barbarians."

"Like we were when we came in."

"Yes," he agreed, "like all the men and women in a civilization that builds in three dimensions."

THEY walked for a moment in silence. Then she said:

"What shall we do? Shall we tell the world about it?"

"No," he replied after a moment. "I don't think so. That power was stored up against civilization's day of need. When that day came, the power couldn't be used. But our civilization too may have its day of need. War, or disease, or cosmic disaster may some day threaten to destroy it. When that day comes the world will need the power stored in that disk.

"There's only a certain amount of power. The light became dimmer each time we took some of the power. And we don't know how to build it up. But when the world needs that power most, some one could come here and take all of it. I think we only scratched the surface. If we concentrated on the disk again we'd get more power. If we kept doing that, we could get it all."

"But shouldn't we at least tell some one?"

He shook his head.

"Why? What good would it do? So for as we know no one can pass the wall of fear but us. And if some one managed to, and was able to go beyond the disk, how do we know what he'd do with the power? After all, it's still only blind power, even if it does come from a world of more than three dimensions. And all power must be guided by a human will . . ."

"Yes," she agreed, "you're right—only . . ."

A moment later he said:

"So, I guess all we can do is to use the power ourselves. We can live as no other people have ever lived, go through a dozen lifetimes in a year, be the first man and woman to be truly the masters of their fate."

She did not answer, or look at him. When they reached the white flakes of dust that showed where the Cretan had fallen in the passage, she stopped. For a long time she stared at the forlorn hope of a civilization who had fallen only a few steps from enough power to blast a world.

"Rod, I said something about the evil that men do living after them, but I forgot the rest of the quote: *the good is oft interred with their bones.*"

He started forward, but she remained motionless. He swung the flashlight on her. It cast a gigantic shadow of her head on the wall.

"I don't think you realize," she said finally, "what it all means." Then she added without apparent connection: "A dynamo transforms other types of energy into electrical energy—but it all goes back to that ultimate energy which science has always known was somewhere just outside of our three dimensions."

Suddenly she looked at the blank wall before her. Then a spot of unbearable brilliance appeared on the polished surface. Swiftly it moved, and as it did, letters were written into the rock. The grooves which the light cut were blackened and fused as if by terrific heat.

When the flame had finished writing, it remained still long enough for Rod to read: "I love you" seared into the limestone. Then darkness clapped down, leaving him temporarily blinded.

IN a moment her voice went on:

"You see, we are sort of dynamos. I just transformed ultimate energy into heat energy—and when I did so, a little bit of the disk's power was lost forever."

She paused, and then went on, speaking as casually as if she were discussing a dinner menu.

"But that isn't all. There's a war going on in Asia, a senseless, stupid war. I'll stop it."

"How?"

She smiled softly.

"Darling, don't forget what we are—what we can do. Use your speeded up brain to break down the ideas which are carryovers from our old lives. Begin to realize what power we really have."

Once again he had a strange feeling when he used his brain. Thoughts, linking with unbelievable swiftness, spread before him the vistas which had become theirs when they had made that last push into the world beyond the disk.

And even as his speeding brain formed the answer to his questions, she went on:

"Strange flames will melt great holes in the war fleet of two nations. A premier will hear a voice which will tell him to make peace or die. Radio stations throughout the world will be drowned out by a broadcast which will tell the whole earth the truth. . . .

"There will be other things. All that remains is to work out the details. And with brains that work at the speed of ours, that shouldn't be so hard."

She stopped. For one last time his mind, running down its old familiar paths, almost laughed at the incongruity of the situation. A man and a woman, standing in a tunnel bored into a Mediterranean island, were agreeing to stop a great war! He started to break this strange spell, to explain away this madness that had come upon them —and stopped.

Slowly full realization spread from the depths of his being. *It was true.* That broken tablet inscribed with strange Cretan characters had spoken truly: *He who possesses it, possesses all.*

"Come close to me, my sweet," Joan said softly. "Put your arms around me. Now look into my eyes. You know what I am about to say. We read thoughts, you and I. And we know that this thing *is not ours to give away.*"

"You mean we should give it back to the disk—but how?"

"No." —they were no longer talking in words. Ideas flashed between their minds without using the clumsy mechanisms of speech—"We will use it—to remake a world."

Suddenly his mind seemed to be at the center of a vast silence, as if all contacts with the outside world had been cut off, so that he could face this thing undisturbed.

Yes, she was right. He realized now that he had known it from the first—that some day the choice must come. Only she had been strong enough to force the issue at once. The disk had freed them—but the price of freedom was choice. And as the power became greater, the choice became more terrible.

But there was no help for it. The fate of a planet must be decided in that dim passageway.

HE broke through the strange feeling of isolation, and directed his thoughts to Joan.

"We are not God. How are we to know that we are right?"

Her thoughts came to him in reply.

"If we cannot judge, who will ever be able to. No other human brains will ever be as clear as ours."

"But what will happen to us?"

"Whatever, it can't be worse than living with ourselves if we don't try."

"But how—how do you remake a world?"

"Our brains will supply the means—and the power."

"I—I doubt it. There are limits to everything."

She smiled, and spoke for the first time aloud.

"You have forgotten one thing. We have only taken a tiny bit of the power that lies behind the disk. When we have it all . . ."

"You mean . . .?"

"Yes, beloved. Give me your hand. We are going back—and when we leave the room, the rose glow will be gone forever."

"But we don't know what will happen to us. We don't know how much power one human being can stand. We . . ."

"We'll know in a minute, and," she added softly, "whatever happens, we'll go together."

His hands tightened around her shoulders, his eyes steady on hers. For an instant the normal world called him back. Its pleading voice was rich and fragrant with all the sensations, the hates and loves, the hopes and fears, of the life which all men before him had led.

Even the senseless muddle of everyday life, with its limits and its futilities, pleaded with him to turn back. It was none too pleasant a world, but it was his world, the only world he had ever known, *that anyone had ever known.*

But the voice of the past was somehow thin and weak. For within him thundered power such as no human being, except the girl beside him, had ever known—power to shatter a world and rebuild it as they would.

And before him were gray eyes that were pleading with him to do a thing such as the whole cosmos had never witnessed.

Yes, she had been right, as she was always right. If you sipped this wine, you must drain the glass. He directed his thoughts to her:

"And if we come back . . ."

"We go to the Sierras," her thoughts replied. "You know the place we saw on our honeymoon—where the black rock juts out below the glacier."

"Yes, I remember. We saw it as the sunrise was tearing the mist veil from it."

"We'll build a house there, under the glacier—no, don't ask how. We will never use that word again. We'll build a home, a laboratory, and whatever else we may need—and then we'll cleanse this planet and make it fit for man."

He hesitated only an instant. Then he smiled, and his lips pressed hard against hers.

They went forward with their arms about each other, while the rose glow brightened in their faces.

IT had been almost twenty years since the *Givers of Power* had first spoken. Long since the world had ceased to tremble when those quiet voices were heard over the radio sets of the entire planet. For not once in those two decades had the *Givers of Power* been unjust, or broken their word. No man had failed to gain by voluntarily co-operating with their suggestions, and every man who had fought against them had been given every benefit of a doubt before he was sentenced.

Only few men, whose lives were a menace to the peace and happiness of the planet, had died because the *Givers of Power* willed it so. And the last of those tragedies had been in the early years of the New Order.

And so man lived in peace, and civilization progressed at a pace unequalled in history. Of course, fear of the *Givers of Power* still remained in the depths of all men's minds, a dim fear that this would some day turn out to be an evil whim of the power which ran the cosmos. But the years of peace and advancement had pushed that fear into the borderline of consciousness.

For men's minds were almost entirely occupied with the new and infinitely greater vistas which were opening before them. The never-ending

possibilities of the planet which had been born again crowded out all other thoughts.

Now that the fourth of the five year cycles was ending, the larger pattern began to become clear. That was as the *Givers of Power* had said it would be when they launched the first cycle on the eve of the day when the Asiatic war had been stopped by unseen forces, which were utterly unconcerned with the greatest arrays of armaments or the most grandiloquent words of statesmen.

First to leave the earth forever were the three great destroyers—war, epidemic disease, and starvation.

War was wiped from the earth in a week. For after that time, not a battleship remained above water, not a heavy gun was in working order, or a military plane able to fly. Every mechanism of mass murder had been seared by the strange flames which never killed, but left the implements of war useless and broken.

Twice in the early years of the New Order men had tried once more to rule their fellows by force of arms. The fate of those men had been mercifully swift. In those cases alone the *Givers of Power* had displayed no gentleness, no tolerance of human frailty.

After each of these affairs a simple statement had been made over the regular broadcast, coming from no known transmitter, which once a day drowned out all earthly stations. The statement had been:

"For obvious reasons, the *Givers of Power* have been forced to eliminate a man who sought to lead his fellows back to the jungle."

That had been all. The men had died before they heard the end of the announcement.

The next of the great scourges of humanity to be driven from the earth was epidemic disease. This was slower, for the *Givers of Power* worked through man's own science. But in the end their program brought annihilation to those diseases which science could prevent.

ONE after another, cholera, plague, smallpox, typhus, typhoid, tetanus. diphtheria, tuberculosis, and a dozen others were forced into extinction. Meanwhile science, stimulated by its new power and freedom, began a fight to the finish with those diseases which it had not yet conquered. The human lifetime began to stretch by leaps and bounds, and the dead weight of useless suffering began to lift from the shoulders of humanity.

The end of starvation followed swiftly after the reorganization of governments. In each country a group of scientists was placed at the head of the state. To a large degree these men were allowed to draw up their own plans for cooperation with the *Givers of Power,* but specific suggestions were often sent them by special radio messages from the new rulers of the planet.

Not that the *Givers of Power* meddled in the petty doings of human beings. They were concerned only with sketching the broad outlines of the New Order. Murder, deceit, and treachery still filled the world, but on an individual, rather than a national, scale—however, such human stupidities were never allowed to block the progress of science. For the *Givers of Power* were scientists above all else.

Asia was the first of the continents to be subjected to great changes. Universal birth control, whose technique was broadcast daily by order of the *Givers of Power,* began to cut the population to reasonable limits. Then enforced migrations cleared the population from arid and sterile land. Gradually Asia's millions were shifted towards the higher country—into Mongolia, Tibet, and the Himalayas. There

the people, stimulated by the cold and the clean air, were aided in bringing a reasonable number of children into a world from which the spectre of starvation was forever banished.

To provide modern homes and the advantages of civilization for these emigrants, the wealth of the upper classes was put to work changing and building, tearing down mountains, altering the course of rivers, and in general doing for Asia what it had once done for America.

Occasionally, when mechanical progress was blocked by some apparently unsurmountable obstacle, the strange force would come, and in a night a mountain would be levelled, or a canal dug. Sometimes the chief engineer of a project would go to sleep baffled, and dream of a complete solution to his problem.

While Asia was still in the turmoil of reconstruction, things began to happen in Europe. The United States of Europe became a reality over night. A commission was ordered to draw up the plans. The nations, lost without their accustomed armaments, followed the plan gladly.

Up in the northern countries, useless land was gladly abandoned when land better suited for human life was made accessible. And in Africa, the jungle was turned back to the beasts as unfit for human life.

"Some day," the *Givers of Power* said in a broadcast, "such land will be needed, and then men will be strong enough to make it fit for their use."

There was some tragedy, of course, in all this change. Some people cried to Allah and to Buddha to be allowed to keep their old surrounding of stench and death. But it soon became obvious that, although the *Givers of Power* would save men from all unnecessary suffering, they would never turn aside from their plans. Those plans had the strength of truth — the same truth which reasonable men had always seen. And no amount of crying to the gods would avail to change them.

When the most flagrant of human stupidities had been cleared away, two sweeping decrees were made, and immediately put into operation.

THE first was that all men should speak one language. This language was devised by an international committee of philologists. The *Givers of Power* did not interfere with the selection of the language. It was no concern of theirs what tongue the world spoke, so long as there was only one. All scientific works were at once translated into the new language. It was taught to children of every country, the older languages being retained only so long as they were necessary for those who were too old to learn the new one.

The second great decree was the establishing of the Supreme Council of Scientists.

This council was international in membership. Its members formed a cross section of the best minds of the world. Gradually the authority originally delegated to the councils of scientists of the various countries was transferred to the Supreme Council. Then it became obvious that the *Givers of Power* had decided that there was to be a "United States of the Earth," under the control of the Supreme Council.

So after less than twenty years, the heavy cloud of human stupidity was beginning to lift from the earth, and man was becoming worthy of his own capabilities.

And after two decades of theory and investigation, the *Givers of Power* remained as inscrutable as the day when they had first decreed that, whether the human race liked it or not, it was about to come of age.

Then came the announcement which stunned the world. For the *Givers of Power* declared that soon they would show themselves before mankind, and explain who they were, and from whence they received the power and the authority to rewrite the destiny of man.

The world was baffled and afraid. For surely the *Givers of Power* were not of this world. They must be omnipotent, superhuman beings. It was strange for such beings to show themselves before men. And so the world was filled with fear, and even the scientists of the Great Council were not happy when they thought of the day when the unbelievable ones would come out of the shadows.

Rod Norton climbed the path with easy, swinging strides. Below him the town of Colton looked like a collection of toy houses. Above, the Norn glacier sat in icy judgment on the town and the doings of men. Some puffy white clouds were gathering, like giant eagles, about the blue mass of ice.

The graying hair at Rod's temples contrasted sharply with the wind-bitten brown of his face. Years had etched but few lines in his face, but those which time had written were written deeply.

Where the path curved before starting the last stiff climb, Rod paused, and stared a moment at the glacier. The clouds were gathering faster now. He shivered slightly and started quickly up the last slope.

AS he climbed, he thought that perhaps after all he should have taken the car. But he always loved to climb the path, to feel the strange beauty of the scene and the nip and zest of the wind from the glacier. And certainly tonight he should not begrudge himself any pleasure.

When he reached the top, the light had faded until he could just make out the low curving line of the house. He passed over the steel bridge which spanned the last gorge, and walked between the beds of arctic poppies that flanked the driveway.

On a sudden impulse he stopped and gathered a handful of the blooms. The twilight was so deep that the blossoms were only a gray cluster. It was not until he had entered the house that he saw their flaming beauty.

He had started into the study, when he was stopped by Joan's thought asking him to come to the laboratory. He went down the ramp which led into the side of the cliff, pausing to touch the switch which would open the series of aluminum doors before him.

Joan was sitting before the black master switchboard of the telepathy-radio broadcaster. Her thoughts came to him as she sent them into the hook-up which would transform thought energy into radio energy and then broadcast it in such a way that the entire earth formed the aerial, thereby preventing any possibility of tracing the message.

"Calling the Supreme Council: You will meet in the great hall of the state building at eight o'clock tomorrow night. The *Givers of Power* will then appear before you. At that time we will explain who we are, and by what right we have altered human history.

"There must be no tumult in the world because of our coming. The orders which we have given you during the last few days must be obeyed implicitly. When the hour arrives we will reveal ourselves to you. This is the final broadcast."

To Rod the click of the switch as Joan cut the power seemed to come from far off. It seemed unreal, as unreal as the words she had just broadcast.

Yet Rod knew that she was to send that message, had even agreed on the

exact wording. He knew too the reason for this last broadcast, the reason they had decided that it was the only possible way out.

Still his mind could not quite understand the fact that this was the last night that they would be masters of a planet, that the strangest drama in human history had come to its final act.

Suddenly Joan's voice reached out and pulled him back to reality. He was surprised. When alone they seldom spoke aloud.

"Big chief heap sour puss bringum cheap bouquet. No need payum florist."

He remembered the poppies in his hand, and held them out to her. He also spoke aloud:

"Thought you might like them. Look nice on your silver outfit."

"Like them! There's nothing else you could have brought me . . ."

"I'm glad. Somehow, they seemed right."

SHE took the flowers, then bent swiftly and kissed him.

"And now," she said after a moment, "is your work finished for the night?"

"Just about. I have half an hour of routine stuff."

"That's fine. That'll just give me time to dress for dinner. By the way, did you send that special broadcast about that rocket ship? I understand it was to be finished today. You know—they're supposed to explode a giant bomb when they reach Mars—to prove to the world that it can be done."

"Yes, I sent the broadcast. But what did you want the rocket built for? Men haven't enough power yet to use it. Besides, they aren't smart enough to navigate it. Do you think you're being fair?"

"Perhaps," she said absently, then added, "you finish your work, then there's something I want to do."

"Yes, darling?"

"I want to have dinner—a simple dinner, a dinner as we might have had it before . . . before we saw the disk."

His voice was low, vibrant:

"We can't go back, not even for an hour—you know that."

She came close to him and very solemnly mussed his hair:

"Always taking things seriously—you act as if you had the problems of the world on your shoulders."

She kissed him swiftly, and went on down the long room. He sat before the switchboard and turned on the power—but his eyes followed her until the gleaming door had closed.

The lightning which flashed about the Norn glacier gleamed in the wine as Don poured it. The curtains had been drawn from the great window which filled almost the entire front wall of the room. Outside the storm was lashing the night into fury.

Don raised his glass, but he looked past it at Joan. She was dressed in silver, the dress cut with the trim, yet comfortable lines which had been universally adopted when the stupid game of style had died with the economic system which created it.

The ghost of a laugh in Joan's eyes was still the same as it had been on that long ago day when they had come to this place on their honeymoon. But her face had become the steady, strong face of a supremely beautiful woman.

And yet there was something more, a strange indefinable touch of a thing that was not of this world. Even he could see it, could understand the reason for the whispered statement which people made so often—"There's something strange about her."

He smiled to himself. So strange to the world—and so simple to him. With an effort he brought his thoughts back to what he must say:

"Well, the hour of make-believe is

over. We've played at being what we can never be again. Now there are some last things that must be discussed. . . ."

She looked at him with smiling tolerance.

"Why?"

"You know—you must. This is our last. . . . We must be sure."

"Aren't we?"

"But we should go over it once more. There might be some other way."

"All right, oh most serious one, we'll make a bargain. We'll go over it all once more—just once—but then the rest of the time must be ours—not the world's—just ours."

HE smiled and nodded.

"Well, where do we begin?" she asked.

"A year ago," he said, "we decided that there was only one way this thing could end. We agreed to give ourselves a year to consider the matter, to hunt for a better solution. That year is over. Have you any other answer?"

She unconsciously substituted thoughts for words:

"Have you?"

"No. There is still the same problem—the one thing that we forgot when we went back down that passage. Men have always been ruled by fear and faith—they are still ruled by fear and faith. The only difference is that now it is all concentrated in us.

"Some day man may be able to take his fate in his own hands. But it will take longer than a generation—a thousand times longer—to remake man's inward nature. And during all the time that human beings are learning to rule their lives by reason, the *Givers of Power* must remain in control. For we have taken all the faith, and power, and authority which man ever knew, and concentrated it in us.

"All the makeshift methods by which men have kept this planet in some sort of order, all the faiths and hopes which helped them to bear up under the heel of fate, were destroyed by us. Even the basis for human science was shattered when we broke its most fundamental laws.

"Humanity cannot go back—and it cannot go forward, *without us.*"

For a moment he broke the chain of thought and glanced at Joan. Her face was immobile. She raised her glass and the lightning flickered through the redness of the wine—flickered and died, flickered and died. . .

"Yes," she answered him, "if for no apparent reason our presence were no longer felt by the world, all man's old hates and fears would rise again, and the earth would be a world of chaos. Only this time men would have no faith, no idealism to see them through. For they have put all their faith in us—and if they believed that we were some unknown beings who had merely toyed with them until we were tired, had only made them the butt of some obscure cosmic jest, then all human idealism would appear stupid and inane."

"And that," he said aloud and with rising bitterness, "is just what men will think—when we die. For we grow old, and in a few brief years the *Givers of Power* will have surrendered to the one enemy they cannot defeat—time."

"And then," she went on, "men will neither be held in check by fear, or uplifted by faith. And we will be responsible. For we have given men supreme hope—and forgotten that all gods must be immortal."

Neither thoughts nor words passed between them for a long time. Outside the eternal storm and the eternal ice went on with their senseless struggle.

"That leaves but one solution," he went on at last. "We must reveal ourselves to the world while we still have some of the power left. In that way

we will be able to help men understand the truth—that their faith must be in themselves."

AND as he thought it, doubt rose darkly in his mind. He put it aside, and started on, when she broke in:

"Yes, I know. It may not work, but it is better than the other way—unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"Nothing."

"Perhaps," he went on, "man will never be able to rule himself, but we must take that chance. It would be so much easier to go on like this, to play the game out until the hour of death and never let the world know who we are—but we couldn't face ourselves if we went through that final door, knowing that we had given men supreme hope, and then taken it from them.

"No, we must reveal ourselves to the world while we still have power to help humanity face the truth."

He spoke the last sentence aloud:

"We can not be cowards, you and I. We do not know to what power beyond the disk we must some day give accounting. But we do know that we must give an accounting to humanity. We must go before the world and take what we have done on our own shoulders—while those shoulders are still strong."

For a long time the room was quiet. Then her thoughts found his again:

"If there were only some way to put the power back into the disk—"

"But we can't—and even if we could, what good would it do? If we could give the power back to the disk, the wall of fear would exist for us again. We would die there in that great room. And the world would only know that the *Givers of Power* had gone away with their job only begun.

"Even if we could build another disk that wasn't protected by a wall of fear, it would still come to the same thing. The power would be gone from the world. And if we left directions so that some one could get the power out at a later date, we couldn't tell what he'd do with it.

"If he used it as we have, he'd be caught just as we are caught. And that wouldn't be fair. We took this on our own heads—and we must see it through. No, we've been all over it a thousand times—and there's no other way out."

There was an almost wistful touch to her thoughts when she picked up the train of ideas where he had left off:

"If only we could build up more power. If only people of our civilization could each give a little power, just as the Cretans did. . . ."

"I know," he agreed. "How many times I've wished that. Remember how we experimented at first. But we knew even then that it wouldn't work.

"The civilization that built up the power behind the disk was a civilization which put its emphasis on things that aren't material, on forces that are on the borderland between the three dimensional world, and another, larger world.

"But our civilization is still deep in the material, three dimensional world. It does not understand the power which that disk represents. And men must find the power within themselves before they can will it through the break in the three dimensional world which the disk makes. Perhaps in a thousand years our civilization will be able to create its own disk—but it can't do it now."

She broke in suddenly:

"What is this power which we possess?"

HE was startled for an instant, until he realized the significance of her question. Then he answered:

"I don't know—but I knew once."

She smiled:

"I know what you mean. I understood, too—in that moment when we went beyond the disk and took away the last of the power. In that instant I saw the answer to all things, to all the riddles and paradoxes that come from living in a world in which we must think in three dimensions and yet know there are more.

"For that one moment I saw how silly all our deep problems are. I saw how space could be limited and yet limitless, how time could end and yet be endless, how we could be individuals and yet be part of something larger.

"I understood too what power was —I mean power in the abstract, not petty little secondary effects such as gravity and radiation. I saw that the three dimensional world was the dream —and that the other world was the reality.

"But when I went back into the three dimensional world I couldn't take that understanding with me. I had to leave it on the borderline. All I can do now is to try to use three dimensional ideas to describe a world that's more than three dimensional. But it won't work. I can just describe it—I can't understand it."

"Remember," he went on after a moment, "we aren't the only ones who have had this power. Of course, the others only had a tiny bit, but it was the same thing.

"There have always been stories of strange people—mystics, psychics, wonder-workers—who could move things without touching them, could read other people's thoughts. These men and women broke so-called natural law on a small scale. We do the same thing on a large scale."

"Only," she added, "we don't break the laws of the world—because we understand more truly what those laws really are. We understand that a three dimensional world must exist in some larger world—some world whose laws are different and vaster.

"We know too that energy must be fundamental to that other world, because it is the only thing in our world which is eternal. Therefore all our energy must come from that other world—only as soon as it gets to ours it is transformed into the specific kinds of energy we understand.

"You and I have tapped that fundamental energy—or at least the little bit of it which the Cretans built up in its pure form. But that fundamental energy must be transformed into specific energy. The agency which does that is our personalities, our egos, our souls —or whatever you want to call them.

"The human ego is really something from that larger world. It is only attached to the three dimensional world with thin threads. Therefore, it can act as a sort of transformer. So we can use that fundamental power in any specific way we want."

HE stepped to the window. For a long time he watched the raging storm. Then he spoke aloud:

"You're probably right. One explanation is as good as another. After all the only thing that matters is that we tried to remake a world—and found that there is no place in the universe for half gods."

She came and stood beside him. Her face as she looked into the storm was quiet and gentle.

"My darling, the strong do not regret —for regretting only makes the sin double."

He slipped his arm around her. Outside the storm and the Norn glacier seemed locked in a final, titanic struggle. After a long time he said:

"Then you agree that there is no other way—that all we can do is to tell

the world tomorrow, and hope that it understands."

She nodded.

"And so," he said, "the problem of the world is disposed of. And we still have our night."

"I was just about to remind you of your bargain. I'll call Nola and tell her she may go."

They were silent until the servant had entered. Joan spoke quietly:

"We won't need you again tonight. If you'd like, you can take the car and go down to Colton."

The girl shook her head.

"I think I'll stay here, if you don't mind."

"Why? There's no need to."

The girl looked steadily at her:

"Are you sure?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just, just—" the girl looked away, "that this is a strange night. You know what I mean. Tomorrow the *Givers of Power* will come before the Council. What will happen? You're the only people I know who aren't afraid."

A strange note of reverence came into her voice. "What will they be like? For they are not of this world. It seems so terribly strange that these great fine beings should show themselves."

Joan smiled lightly.

"Let's hope," she said, "that the *Givers of Power* will turn out to be good people."

"But," the girl said with amazement, "they aren't people. It's silly to say that. They're — they're — something beyond, something above . . . but somehow I wish that they weren't ever going to be seen. . . ."

In his mind Rod saluted the steadiness of Joan's voice when she said:

"You're being silly, Nola. Whatever happens tomorrow, the thing for you to do tonight is to take the car and your boy friend and go down to Colton. And you'd better hurry before he thinks you're not coming and goes out with someone else."

The girl wavered a moment, then she smiled:

"All right—if you're sure I can't be of any help."

Joan did not look at her when she answered.

"I'm sure. You can't help."

THE girl seemed undecided for a moment longer, then she turned towards the door. On a sudden impulse Joan called her back.

"Nola," she said softly, "you have been with us for a long time—and you have been very faithful. We appreciate it. Is there anything we could do for you—anything that you particularly want?"

A strange look came into Nola's face. Rod realized what had occurred. He had seen it happen many times before. Joan had let that something creep into her voice which gave people the strange feeling that this poised, beautiful woman could in all reality make anything she wished come to pass.

Nola's hands twisted together convulsively. Seconds ticked by before she spoke:

"No—there is nothing, nothing that I want. You couldn't do it. I only want one man to love me." She looked away. "But only the *Givers of Power* could do that."

A silence that seemed loud filled the room. Only in the depths of Rod's mind he heard Joan think, "If it were only a mountain she wanted moved."

Suddenly, Nola looked up.

"I'm sorry," she said quickly. "It wasn't fair."

She turned and went out.

Rod Norton's tall figure was silhouetted against the storm. The irony in his voice was very gentle:

"No, it wasn't fair."

The little plane was poised above the city. Rod pointed at a break in the lights below them:

"There's the landing field. We'll just make it to the Great Hall in time. Shall I bring the ship down?"

Joan's thought came to him with unexpected imperativeness:

"No—not yet."

He turned to her, surprised:

"Why not?"

"There's something I have to say first. I didn't want to tell you until now— Let me have the controls, while you go back and get that big case I had you put aboard just before we left."

He stared at her an instant, and then relinquished the controls. While he was getting the case his thoughts were linking swiftly. When she had shown him the case, and told him to put it on the plane, he had been surprised, had asked her what was in it, what she could want to take with them.

She had told him evasively that it contained documents of importance. The explanation hadn't satisfied him, but there had been no time to ask about it again. After they started, they had been busy discussing what they would say to the Supreme Council.

Now that he thought about it, the case seemed to fit in with many other peculiar things that Joan had done of late. It seemed to be part of some plan of which he had been ignorant. Quickly he returned to where Joan sat at the controls.

SHE turned to him, and started to speak aloud. Then suddenly she put her arms around him. After a moment she took his face between her hands. She communicated in a strange mixture of thoughts and words.

"Beloved—who have been my partner in the very strangest thing that ever happened anywhere—there is one thing more that I must tell you. Last night we agreed that there was no other way out—but there *is* another way."

He stared at her, his brain refusing for a moment to believe.

"But you didn't . . ."

"I couldn't tell you last night. I wanted those last hours to be—to be just what they were. If I had told you, it would have made those hours terrible."

"What—what is the other way?"

"Think first of one thing. If we reveal ourselves to men, we will not only become mortal to their eyes—we will also become mortal to their hates. We can be killed; and there are plenty of men who would wish to do so, plenty who would think that by so doing they would gain our power.

"If we used our power to build up protection for ourselves, we would become only a larger model of those despots of whom the world has seen too much. That would be a sorry end for the *Givers of Power*.

"The day an assassin's bullet killed us, that day man's last and greatest faith would be destroyed even more completely than if we died without his ever knowing who we are. The world which we have built could never stand such a blow. Use only a little imagination, for it is not pleasant to picture all of such a chaos."

"But we may live until we can teach men enough. In any case, it's a chance we must take. That is what we decided."

"But there is another, a third way."

"What?"

"If men believed that we were not of this world—that we came from another. If they believed that we were immortal, and that we left the earth only to return at some future date—then our laws might be obeyed.

"What if men thought that we had come from some other planet, and been

stranded here—and that because we pitied men, we had decided to raise them above the stupid chaos they had made for themselves?—that in repayment for this, we had caused men to build a space ship by which we could return to our own world.

"If we left the earth under such dramatic circumstances, we would leave behind us an all-powerful myth. The other night we admitted that in the final analysis we ruled by fear. If the world thought that our eyes were forever watching, if the myth of our returning remained behind us — it might keep man's lower nature in check long enough for his reason to take permanent control."

She spoke the last sentence very softly, her eyes steady on him: "At least we would not have shattered man's last faith."

"But how could we make men believe that? It's too late for such ideas now—if you had thought of it before . . ."

She pointed to something beneath them, on the outskirts of the city:

"What's that down there?"

HE peered at it a moment. Then he made it out.

"That's the Martian rocket you had built—the rocket that man hasn't the power to use . . ."

Suddenly he stopped.

She smiled.

"You understand now. We have the power to drive it, the brains to guide it. When we reach Mars we can explode the bomb—that light would be picked up by telescopes on the earth and prove that what we said was true.

"In the case you've been wondering so about are space suits. The helmets will hide our faces when we go before the Supreme Council. To all outward appearances we will be just what we say we are."

"Then you mean that some day we would come back?"

She could not look at him. The words seemed wrenched one by one from the center of her being.

"No—we could never come back. Remember the reason we would create this myth is because the world must never know that we will die. If we came back, men would find out the truth.

"Even if we could come back without men knowing it, we could never resist the temptation to tinker with human stupidity again. So we must put such miles of space between us and the earth that we will never again know what occurs on the face of this strange planet.

"We have cast ourselves in the roles of God and Goddess. And we must play out those parts—even unto the end. And so my darling, our exile must be forever."

Suddenly realization burst in his mind. His hands went out blindly towards her. He struggled to bring coherent thoughts out of the agony of his mind.

"Oh God, Joan, you don't know what you're saying—we would never see the earth again—never see a sunset, never feel the wind, or see a flower—you can't ask it—you can't . . ."

She spoke quietly:

"The decision is yours, my sweet. What you say, I will do."

He bent over her, staring into her eyes—deeper and deeper into them—into that realm where the eternal sweet laughter dwelt. The moments went by. Then suddenly he straightened up. He spoke proudly:

"Let it not be said that earth's last god was unworthy of his goddess—give me the space suit."

THE endless rows of faces in the Great Hall seemed somehow unreal

to Rod. Perhaps, he thought, it was due to the quartz lenses which sealed the two small openings in the front of his space helmet.

His voice, coming from the loud speaker on his chest, seemed strange and far off. He struggled to keep his speech steady, his voice measured.

For an instant he glanced at Joan, then he turned back to the hall. There was but a little more that he must say:

"And so friends of the earth, we have told you how by chance we were stranded on this world, and how we then decided to make certain changes in human civilization.

"How we could do this, how we kept concealed, how we can communicate in your language, we cannot explain to you. These things are beyond the understanding of beings of a young world such as this.

"So, too, is the reason for our actions in remaking your civilization. We could have forced men to build a space ship for us without doing the things that we have done. But our actions were controlled by other values than that obvious selfishness which is so common on this planet.

"For, my friends, there are values in the universe, both seen and unseen, which you glimpse only dimly. It is to these values that we have been true. There is an eternal right and an eternal wrong in all things. And those who have an opportunity to do good, and let that opportunity slip, are guilty of evil. For this they will be judged by the eternal verities.

"But enough of discussions which are not within your ken. Suffice it to say that we have remade the world in the way that the highest members of your own race have always said it should be remade.

"You, the Supreme Council, have worked out the law which must govern civilization. We agree with that law. It is but the fundamental law for intelligent cooperation between men. And so we decree that it shall be the only law, and that all men shall be faithful to it.

"And now, my friends, the time is near when we must depart."

He couldn't go on. Something within him refused to say the final words. His thoughts begged Joan to carry on. She stepped forward.

"It may seem that we are leaving you forever. But it is not so. Surely you have seen enough to realize that you are not able to judge our power. And we who have begun the remaking of a world will not abandon that world. For we do not die—as you understand death.

"What is done on earth will be known to us. Some day we may return. But always we will be watching, waiting for the day when man can take his place beside us in that larger understanding which lies ahead.

"And in the years and centuries to come the *Givers of Power* will continue to aid man. As in the past—so in the future. But we will interfere less and less with the doings of men. You will hardly know that we are still watching.

"But we will still be there—understanding, and just.

"Now we go to the space rocket."

FOR a long moment there was utter silence in the Great Hall. Then an old scientist rose. His voice came dimly to Rod:

"You have saved science for us, and made it safe from the hates and stupidities of men. For that we should kneel to you."

Joan's voice answered swiftly:

"Kneel not to us. Kneel to nothing but the reality within yourselves. In the fullness of time, you will understand those vaster realities which we discussed a moment before. Until then, we will

guide you.

"Now we will go to the rocket. Let no man come close to us, for the power which we possess is sometimes dangerous."

Alone they went down the long passage which led to the rocket gun. And as they went, the feeling of unreality completely took possession of Rod's mind.

On down the passage. One passage —and then another. Was there any answer, any meaning? Had this ever happened at all? And if it had, were they doing right?

Joan's thought came to him:

"Just a little farther, a little farther . . ."

Then suddenly they were out of the passage and standing before the giant rocket gun that towered into the night sky. A great crowd of men and women split and let them pass.

Had they done right? For ever and ever on a dead world—oh, God . . .

They were on the catwalk beside the rocket now. The great crowd was spread before them. Joan was speaking.

"Our friends of earth, we have but shown you a little of what we can do."

He couldn't go on—he couldn't. It wasn't right to cheat the world. A lie never did any good. He spoke quick, frantic words to her:

"Joan, Joan, stop. We can't do it."

She did not seem to have heard him.

"Some day we will be back. And always we will be watching."

He clutched her arm.

"No, no—this isn't the way—we can't, we can't . . ."

Her level voice continued.

"Our law is but the law of the universe. He who transgresses that law is punished. That we have—and may again—be the instrument of such punishment does not mean that we wish to control the destinies of human beings. We merely seek to keep them from those ways in which lie disaster."

"I'll tell them who we are. See, I'm about to take off my helmet. Stop . . . stop . . ."

Her voice did not waiver.

"And so we give you power, power to conquer your world. And we will stand ready—forever—to help you."

She stepped forward and held up her hands:

"Good night and goodby, our friends of the earth—until we come again."

HIS hands were fumbling with the helmet when THE VOICE stopped him.

It wasn't quite a voice. It spoke in ideas—and directly to his brain. But it wasn't Joan's voice. It was a quiet friendly voice that gave a pleasant warmth to the stream of ideas which it presented to him:

"No," it said, "that is not the way. For now is the time to tell you the truth —for you have only seen darkly until now. Add now the last link to the chain."

Quickly he turned his thoughts to Joan. Yes, she too had heard THE VOICE.

"You have always wondered," THE VOICE went on, "how the Cretans could have had such knowledge, how they could have been so advanced a civilization. But did you ever stop to think that the disk might not have been made by the Cretans, that it might have been old when the Cretan civilization was born?

"Could not that tablet have been merely part of an ancient legend which the Cretans vaguely remember, as the Greeks and the Assyrians and the other peoples had myths from the past—even from that strange flood which featured in every legend. And might not the Cretan whose bones you found in the passage have been killed by his own

country men because he broke the taboo and entered the forbidden passage wherein dwelt the gods.

"So now add the last link in the chain. For if the disk were not Cretan—and if its power were not of this world—then perhaps the people who put it there *were not of this world.*

"What if a colony of beings from another planet was destroyed by this universally remembered flood—destroyed before anyone could reach the power which had been stored up—and which these beings alone know how to use. Does that, perhaps, make better sense?

"There is but one other thing. You and Joan can read each other's thoughts. Are you sure that you are alone in that? How was it that Joan came to think of this last solution to your problem, and why did she choose to have the rocket pointed at a certain planet?

"Could such suggestions have come to her mind from another world—a world who in its death struggle needs its power as it needs nothing else? Could your accidental discovery of the disk have given that other world the chance it had given up hoping for, the chance to get back some of that power which belongs to it—and which it needs so terribly now?"

Rod forced his mind to break the thought chain and answer:

"But the power is man's."

"No. It never was man's. You have used a certain amount to do good. We honor you for it. But your own logic has shown you that you can do the greatest service now by going away. Grant us the right to guide you home. For our need of your power is great indeed."

Again he broke the stream:

"Who are you?"

"That race of beings which was not of your world, but whose members struggled for a little while on the earth, and built up the power behind the disk—the power that they could never use."

"But man needs that power . . ."

THE voice was faint now.

"You may do as you will. You possess the power. You may do with it as you will . . ."

THE VOICE faded into silence. Rod jerked about and faced Joan.

"You heard?"

"Yes."

"Was it . . ."

"I don't know—but does it matter?"

"But we must be loyal to man."

"The decision is already made."

"If we only knew—was it only some strange justification from within our own minds?"

"Does it matter?"

She turned and stepped through the door into the rocket. He gave one last, fleeting look at the planet earth and followed. She was sitting at the controls, the telephone to the firing station on her head. He heard the hiss and clang as she turned on the mechanism which closed the doors of the rocket, sealing them against the enigmas of outer space.

He came and stood beside her.

"Was it . . . Are we going to bring it to them . . . But we cannot rob man. We belong to the race of the earth!"

She only smiled, and spoke into the transmitter.

"Calling the fire control room: Are you ready to fire?"

Then her thoughts came to him:

"We belong only to each other—and the world beyond the disk."

He did not recognize his own voice.

"Are we—are we right?"

Her thoughts answered swiftly:

"It is not ours to give away."

Her slim, strong hands tightened on the switches before her. Her face was steady, and her eyes were smiling.

"Calling the control room—fire!"

MAN FROM THE WRONG TIME-TRACK

by Denis Plimmer

Author of "Men of the Solar Legion," etc.

In mid-air the gigantic form seemed to stop!

FOR immediate release!

The statement which follows concerns the entire world, and for that reason I, Paul Dicey of Irving Place, New York City, am sending copies of it to the world's leading newspapers. What I have to say herein must be considered carefully by all who can read, for in it may lie their salvation and the salvation of billions of their descendants yet unborn!

For this is an account of the mysterious visitation of the stranger, Mok; of my meeting with Carlton Jervis, M. D., and of the enormous consequences thereof.

I shall begin with the night of the great storm in mid-September, 1941.

All that day heat hung sultry and ominous over Manhattan, and about ten that night the storm broke—a wild weird electrical fury striking vicious blue tongues of lightning through the black and swollen sky.

I slammed down my window as the driving rain broke against it in vicious inimical waves. Around the four walls of the old rooming-house on Irving Place the wind tore and rattled and clutched and scraped like a vast invisible giant with clawing importunate fingers. For the sake of coolness I had left my door open. Across the hallway was the only other room on the floor, a room at that time unoccupied.

I was studying for my Doctorate in applied psychology and so deep was I in my books that at first I didn't hear footsteps mounting the crazy ancient staircase, so deep that I noticed nothing until a light glowed suddenly in the hall. Looking up, I saw Mrs. Rafferty,

It was the first time the cop had cut down a man from another Time-track —it was the first time he'd sent that kind of a corpse to the morgue!

my old Irish landlady, emerge from the stairs. She was followed by a stranger. Unlocking the door of the vacant room, she switched on the light within and beckoned the stranger to follow her.

In view of subsequent events, I have always been piqued at the thought that the new lodger did not strike me more vividly at the moment. As it was, in the uncertain light of the hall lamp I perceived only a tall, stooping heavy-set man with an indefinable air of shagginess about him. His back was turned to me the entire time so I had no glimpse of his face. But I did see wide muscular shoulders, long swinging arms, stained and rain-soaked clothing, and twining hair darkly tangled which escaped beneath his hat to cover his thick neck.

I returned to my work with hardly a thought for the newcomer. Minutes passed. The door across the hall closed. A hand touched my shoulder.

"Mr. Dicey!"

It was my landlady who spoke so timidly and in such low tremulous tones.

"Can I talk to you?" she was pleading.

"Of course, Mrs. Rafferty."

Furtively she locked the door. Her expression was a queer blend of fear and horror. She said:

"Did you see him?"

"Whom?"

"The new roomer?"

I stared at her, puzzled.

"Only from the back, Mrs. Rafferty."

HER anxious eyes watched me.

"Then you didn't see his face?"

I shook my head.

Suddenly she collapsed into an armchair.

"I shouldn't be tryin' to run this place alone, I shouldn't," she moaned. "It's not a woman's task!"

Fiercely she gripped my hand.

"He wouldn't sign the register, Mr. Dicey! He wouldn't hardly speak a word. His English is funny. I can't think what country he's from. I don't know his name. Oh, Lord, I don't know anything about him!"

"Then why did you let him in?"

Mrs. Rafferty stared at the carpet.

"Because I was afraid," she breathed.

"Of what?"

"His face."

"What about it?"

Through Irving Place the wind screamed desolately. The rain washed over the screaming window-panes.

"It's the face of an animal!"

I stared, saying, "What kind of an animal?"

Mrs. Rafferty sucked in her breath.

"I don't know, Mr. Dicey. Some kind that don't know kindness nor gentleness, some kind that does things quiet and secret, that does them at night!"

To my instant suggestion that she have a policeman evict this obviously undesirable tenant the old lady demurred. After all, she might be mistaken in her judgment and Lord knew she wouldn't turn a dog out into such a night as this . . .

"Did he pay you anything in advance?"

Mrs. Rafferty displayed a crushed five-dollar bill bunched up tightly in her palm.

"Well," I persisted, not having much desire to share a lonely top-floor with so bizarre a creature, "how would it be, Mrs. Rafferty, if I went in and saw him? Maybe I could form an opinion of my own."

"Oh, don't, Mr. Dicey," she begged. "Please, don't! There's something about him tonight that warns me to leave him alone! I said he had a face like an animal. Well, tonight the animal's come far, he's hungry and tired,

his temper is short! Let him alone, Mr. Dicey, let him alone!"

But by this time my curiosity was afire. I had already started for the door when, distant and faint, a shrill stabbing scream soared from the rainy street.

"Eileen!" Mrs. Rafferty gasped. "That's Eileen's voice!"

I dashed to the window and threw it up, leaning far out into the stormy night. What I saw drove me back and, followed closely by Mrs. Rafferty, I dashed down the shaky staircase. When we arrived in the street less than a minute later, Eileen Rafferty and a little raincoated knot of passers-by were bending over a stricken form.

Eileen was my landlady's granddaughter.

"What is it, child?" cried the old lady.

The rain-drenched girl indicated the huddled figure on the pavement.

"It's Delia," she explained in a quivering tone of raw fright. "I think her throat's cut!"

I bent closer to look. Delia was the colored maid of the house. From her sepia throat a dark river of blood still poured, gradually mingling with the dancing rain.

"She'd left the house through the cellar twenty minutes ago," Eileen was narrating. "We'd given her an advance on her salary. I think she was going to buy some shoes. She must have been caught in the cellar entrance. Afterwards, she managed to stagger out this far."

MRS. RAFFERTY said, "But why didn't we hear her scream?"

Eileen shook her head.

"All the doors and windows were shut, gran," she replied. "The storm was raisin' such a howl you couldn't have heard an army passin'. Then the bell rang, remember, and you took the new fellow upstairs to show him the room."

"Ah yes," I said. "The new lodger. I'm going to talk to him, Eileen, get the police."

And leaving the two women I hurried back up the stairs and knocked on the stranger's door. I heard a grunt, pushed the door open, and entered the room.

The new lodger sat with his back to me. His shaggy head drooped in his hands. Carelessly in the center of the floor lay his damp coat and hat. In one corner, muddied shoes and socks made a grotesque heap.

"Pardon me," I said.

For a moment the drooping figure remained still. Then — slowly — the head swung around. I choked back a cry of terror. The face was infinitely more horrible than Mrs. Rafferty had described it. Although basically feature for feature it was human, its expression of eyes and mouth was that of a wild, hungry man-driven ape, resting from pursuers in a cave under a desolate hill.

For a space we stared at each other stupidly. Several times the stranger opened his great maw of a mouth inarticulately. Finally:

"You want—something?"

The words were uttered with difficulty. The voice, as if unused to human speech, grated rustily.

"Yes," I replied. "Mrs. Rafferty tells me that you failed to sign her register."

Under their shadowy brows the harassed eyes roved about the room helplessly.

"Cannot—write," the creature muttered finally.

"You haven't been taught to write?"

"Nobody write. Forgot—long ago. Five hundreds of—years."

"Your people haven't been able to

write for five-hundred years? Why?"

The monster stared at me. In its eyes a tiny red flame flickered, the same flame which glows in the eyes of a jungle beast goaded into a trap by its enemies.

"Only priests write," he said finally. "Why others—learn?"

From what country did the creature come? He shook his head. And his name?

"Mok."

"What's your other name?"

The response to this was unexpected. With lightning speed Mok heaved his giant bulk from the chair. Hands swinging ape-fashion, eyes red with rage, he tottered towards me.

"Tired," he bellowed, towering above my head. "Go! Sleep! Tired! Sleep! Sleep! See?"

Before this onslaught I fled to the hallway. The door slammed. A metallic fumbling within was accompanied by heavy breathing. The lock clicked. Something told me that locks were strange affairs to this outlandish animal.

"SLEEP!"

The word welled up within the room, spiralled through the house. Another grunt, and the bed groaned as that prodigious body fell upon it. Suddenly I realized that the thing called Mok had been unbelievably exhausted.

Downstairs the two women were pallid and trembling. Mrs. Rafferty, huddled in an armchair, was staring white-faced at Eileen. Delia had just been taken to the morgue. I told them of my experience.

WHEN I had done, Mrs. Rafferty extended her hand. In it still lay the five-dollar bill.

"Look at it, Mr. Dicey!" Eileen whispered.

Wonderingly I unfolded the note, smoothing out the grimy creases. Of a sudden nausea rose within me.

The bill's upper left-hand corner was blood-soaked.

For a while the room was heavy with silence. I said:

"Eileen, did you give Delia a five-dollar bill?"

Eileen nodded dumbly.

"*This* five-dollar bill?"

"I don't know. I—I can't be sure."

I turned to the door, saying.

"I'm going to take this to the police."

Instantly Mrs. Rafferty clutched my arm.

"You can't, Mr. Dicey," she begged. "I won't let you!"

"But this is brutal murder. That thing upstairs may be a homicidal maniac. God knows he looks it!"

Mrs. Rafferty sobbed.

"I don't care. I've got the reputation of my house to keep. I can't afford to involve one of my lodgers in a murder case. Not unless I'm sure he's guilty. If the police are good for anything, they'll get him some other way. This can't be the *only* clue!"

Slowly I turned back. Although I hated the idea of sharing a lonely top-floor with a possible criminal, I appreciated Mrs. Rafferty's viewpoint.

"All right," I conceded. "We'll say nothing—yet."

So did I leave the two terrified women.

The next day I passed at the university. On my return that evening I found my landlady seated quietly in her basement parlor. What of the new lodger?

"I haven't set eyes on him," Mrs. Rafferty replied. "What sort of weird animal he is I don't know, but he has no regular job, and he seems satisfied to sit in his room all day alone. He hasn't even been out to eat. I've been watching for him, believe me!"

The main entrance to the old building lay just outside Mrs. Rafferty's

sub-sidewalk window. My eye wandered to it and when she finished speaking I put my finger to my lips. Just outside, the thing called Mok was slowly descending the steps. As we watched, he disappeared down the darkening street.

"That's the first breath of air he's had all day, so help me!" the old landlady whispered. We sat there in the gathering dusk for a quarter of an hour until Mok returned, shambling down the street and into the house. We heard him climbing the stairs.

I sat there a few moments longer. Then I went to my room.

The next three hours passed in study. I have fortunately taught myself concentration but, as the clock checked off the minutes, unbidden thoughts kept scattering through my brain. I thought of Delia lying on the gleaming pavement with her throat gaping redly, of Eileen's tormented face, and of the grim lodger a few feet down the hall. And I fell to examining his strange remarks, to analyzing them, to attempting some sort of a coherent integration of them.

Apparently he was unfamiliar with America, had come a long distance, was poor and exhausted. The land he came from was priest-ridden and during the past five hundred years illiteracy had been the rule. The stranger was white. For a while I considered the strange rumors of vanished white races said to be hidden away in the hearts of Asia and Africa. Even these hardly seemed to fit the case. Besides, they smacked too much of travellers' tales to elicit much belief from me. In the final analysis, his land of origin sounded much like Europe before the year One-thousand. But it certainly resembled no modern country that I had ever heard of.

Instinct suddenly made me look up. In my doorway was Mok!

THE sight of that huge bulk of bestial life sent a chill through my body. Striving to hide my terror, I said:

"What is it, Mok?"

Slowly he lifted his hand. From the hairy paw dangled an absurd piece of gaily-spotted material. A man's bow-tie.

Mok gulped. His cruel face underwent an odd change which I interpreted as an apologetic grin. He held the tie towards me.

"You fix—yes?"

For a moment I was speechless. Then it dawned upon me that he had in some way acquired a bow-tie and would now like to wear it as he had seen others do.

Threading the garish thing through his collar, I tied it in a rakish butterfly knot. The effect was grotesque. The spectacle of that ugly simian face crowning the ridiculous little splash of colored cloth made me chuckle in spite of my fear. I held up a mirror before the monster. Wonderingly, he studied his reflection.

Then from out that muscled cavernous throat great laughter welled. With thick and clumsy fingers he touched the bow. Then turning to me he reached forth his hand. At first I started back. Then I stopped. The hand was affectionately stroking my hair.

Mok was pleased!

"Where you come from," said I, "don't they have bow-ties?"

After much stuttering, he shook his head.

"What do you live in?" I pursued hopefully.

"Hut. Hut from—big—stones."

"How long have you lived in these huts?"

Slowly t h r o u g h the tortuous labyrinth of Mok's intelligence my words filtered.

"Always," he answered finally. "Since big war."

"What war?"

"War of giants—long ago!"

Again his fingers strayed to the tie beneath his chin. Again the happy smile crinkled his face. With a final pat on my head, he ambled back to his room.

For a while I pondered this new facet, a facet showing childlike vanity quite touching and distinctly appealing. It seemed hard to picture this great grinning thing slitting Delia's ebony throat. I continued my speculations concerning the land of his birth. A land in which bow-ties were unknown, where many years ago there had been a war. Something in the way he mentioned this made me feel that it had occurred generations back, long before Mok or his father or his father's father had been born. He referred to it much as moderns refer to the discovery of America, as an event of antiquity, almost a milestone of tradition.

I was just preparing for bed when Mrs. Rafferty knocked softly. I admitted her. As on the previous night, she locked the door.

"Mr. Dicey," she whispered "I don't feel right about letting you sleep up here so near to him."

Remembering the incident of the tie, I smiled.

"He never killed Delia, Mrs. Rafferty. He's too good natured."

She compressed her lips. Her eyes held mine.

"The body of an old man has been found behind a signboard in a vacant lot three blocks away. Mr. Dicey, his neck was broke . . ."

Suddenly I went cold.

"Who was he?"

Mrs. Rafferty shook her head.

"No one I ever saw. A nice-looking weak little old man. His poor thin neck was all twisted like a dead chicken's. It was horrible! And the queer thing was—" she lowered her voice—"that he was fully dressed except for one thing. *He had no tie!*" She unlocked the door. "You've been warned, sir. Bolt yourself in tonight. I'm going to!"

Before I could speak, she was gone. I could hear her scurrying down the dark stairs.

DIGGING my nails into the palms of my hands, I fought to keep my head. The ghastly picture was bright in my brain of Mok trailing the little old man, getting him into a dark garbage-strewn lot, and wringing his neck —for a gay piece of cloth!

Suddenly I saw how in character the murder was. It had elements of the bizarre, the horrible, the grotesque. A useless senseless slaughter for a thing of adornment, but it was right . . . It was what Mok would do!

I jumped to my feet. A sound had reached me—the sound of a nearby door slamming, of heavy feet descending the stairs. How long I stood there frozen I don't know, but the blood surged in my veins at the sound of a low cry from the depths of the building, the cry of a woman in mortal terror. With a single leap I was through the door. As I descended the stairs, the low cry was repeated. My flying feet drowned it out. Panting, I reached Mrs. Rafferty's door.

As I did so, it flew open with a deafening crash. With express-train speed a giant figure shot out, starting up the stairs in great animal-like hops. I ran into the room. Mrs. Rafferty, chalk-white and shaking, cowered in the corner.

"I was eating a piece of bread," she gasped. "He knocked me down and took it from me. He was hungry!"

A burly policeman attracted by the screams entered. Briefly I explained the situation. Together we started up the stairs. Halfway up the officer shouted to Mok to surrender. The

answer was violent. A light chair spun down the stair-well, splintering and crashing. We dodged. The missile hurtled by harmlessly. Mingled with the stamping of feet, we heard Mok's mumbled incoherencies. The bullet-like crack of a slammed door echoed.

A few more steps carried us to the top floor. Mok's door faced us. Within the creature panted heavily.

"Mok," I shouted, "come out!"

The only reply was a guttural monosyllable.

The policeman beat upon the thin panel of the door with his nightstick.

"Open up!"

Drawing his pistol, he sent two slugs tearing through the flimsy lock. A guttering howl of pain arose. The door fell open. Across the room Mok was clambering through the window. We rushed him but he was quick. Swinging out onto a fire-ladder, he mounted to the roof. Cursing, the patrolman followed, I at his heels. Striving not to look down at the distant street, I climbed the rusted rungs and swung myself over the lip of the roof. A gigantic moonlit form loped across its tarred surface, thrusting the sturdy patrolman aside as if he had been a child.

With a single clean leap Mok gained the high coping. Barely eight feet separated the top of Mrs. Rafferty's house from the roof of a neighboring building. Tensing his iron muscles, Mok launched himself into dizzy space. A straight arrow of flame from the revolver's mouth split the darkness. In mid-air the gigantic form seemed to stop, hanging for a breathless instant on the jet bosom of Night.

Then with a piteous animal-like cry, he fell sprawling and clutching through the empty air. The policeman and I leaned over the roof's rim just as the body struck. It bounced on the hard sidewalk, lurched, and landed scare-crow-postured across the curb. Even as we watched, the dark shadows of the curious began to encircle the body like jackals about a slain tiger.

When we reached the street, a pale slender man was just rising from a scrutiny of the remains of Mok!

"My name is Jervis, officer," he said quietly. "I'm a doctor. This—man—is dead."

There was something strange in the hesitation before *man*. The doctor noted my look of inquiry and explained gravely:

"I say *man* for want of an apter word."

We stared at the body, then with a common accord leaned closer.

For something was happening to it!

NEVER shall I be able adequately to describe what followed. As we watched a miracle took place. In swift metamorphoses the brutish face of the dead Mok was changing, growing younger. The beard lightened and disappeared, the heavy lines around the eyes melted, the rugged contours of the jaw softened. Before us was the face of youth. Simultaneously the huge body appeared slimmer, almost—adolescent . . .

Beneath our fascinated eyes the process continued inexorably. Young manhood yielded to boyishness, boyishness to childhood, with a corresponding change in the bulk beneath the clothes. With a lightning movement the doctor tore the already loose shirt aside, exposing the frail delicacy of a youngster's body.

And still the alteration proceeded until in the cold light of the streetlamp the corpse of a baby lay before us. Even that diminished. Teeth vanished, hair; muscular hands became pudgy and dimpled.

Tinier and tinier grew the corpse at our feet. Feverishly the doctor ripped

clothing aside to watch this wonder. Suddenly the baby's body curled, knees drawn up, hands folded inward, head contracted toward the breast. Before our eyes extremities lost shape; hands, feet, and head were engulfed in a vague roundness. Suddenly before us lay a tiny lump of indeterminate flesh, cushioned on the discarded clothing of the giant. The flesh dwindled to the size and shape of a large pearl. That was replaced by a glinting jewel of moisture which vanished before our awe-struck gaze. Now nothing remained before us —nothing but the crumpled outline of garments which once had clothed the savage stranger.

We had seen the mystic process of birth—reversed!

"Where is he?" the dazed policeman muttered.

Jervis looked up, smiling faintly.

"Somewhere in Time, officer," was all he said.

The officer bent over. Gingerly he gathered up the heap of worn clothes.

"What are you going to do with those?" I asked.

He grinned sheepishly.

"Damned if I know," he responded. "If I take 'em to the morgue, they'll say I'm crazy. If I take 'em to headquarters, they'll say I'm crazy. Any way you look at it, somebody'll say I'm crazy!" He shook his head. "Maybe I am."

"Here's my card," said Jervis. "If you need any help in your dilemma, just give me a ring." He retrieved a small object from the pavement. "And here's final evidence that you shot a man and not a ghost."

His extended hand held a piece of metal.

"My bullet!" exclaimed the policeman.

"And," Jervis concluded, "flattened on one side as all bullets are when they strike bone. Good night."

Mumbling to himself, the patrolman wandered down the street, the heap of discarded clothes cradled in his brawny arms.

I was anxious to discuss the whole affair, so I invited Jervis up to my room. A few minutes later, seated in my armchair, he was intently listening to my narration.

When I was through, he wrinkled his brow.

"You say, Mr. Dicey," he mused, "that Mok came from some land once ravaged by war in which for five-hundred years literacy had been a monopoly of the priesthood, in which the inhabitants lived in stone huts and were unfamiliar with bow-ties or locks, and whose basic impulses, unscreened by any civilized veneer, made them casual murderers?"

"And," I reminded him, "a country of white men."

He nodded.

"What conclusions do you draw?" he asked.

I SAID, "Well, doctor, I know of no modern nation which would fit those specifications, do you?"

He shook his head.

"I can only think of the Dark Ages," I went on. "The British tribes for example lived in stone huts, they certainly wore no bow-ties, they were notoriously brutal in their attitude toward human life, they were ruled by a weird kind of priesthood, the Druids, they left few written remains, and they experienced wars of one kind or another almost incessantly. Of course I'd never say it in public, but could it be possible—philosophers say that all Time exists simultaneously—that somehow Mok was an ancient Briton who by design or accident strayed into the wrong time-track and found himself in the 20th century? Then when he died, his body, following a natural course, grew

younger, became embryonic, resolved itself into the seed of life, and finally vanished back into its own period?"

My words sounded crazy. Jarvis bit his lip.

"Mr. Dicey, anything is possible, and certainly your hypothesis seems to fit the case. One detail alone rings false! The language spoken by the ancient Britons, the pre-Beowulf tongue, had little connection with modern English. I should think it unlikely that Mok, therefore, could have learned even as much comprehensible language as he did during his brief stay in our century."

I asked the doctor for his own solution.

"I think," he began, "that your time speculation was essentially right. Mok *did* lose himself on the wrong time-track. But he did not come from the past!"

I put the obvious question.

"Go over the facts again," said Jervis. "A certain land, say America, is devastated by war. Civilization is destroyed. Those who survive must live like savages in caves or huts. Learning dies, culture dies, the spoken word almost atrophies. However, modern English in a crudely abbreviated form still remains the basis for such conversation as is needed. As always in a primitive society, a learned circle springs up, possibly a circle numbering the few scientists and scholars left alive, and in their hands learning, a precarious flame, is kept feebly alight. But these men are in the minority, and in order to preserve their safety they call themselves priests and pass their knowledge down from generation to generation. Five hundred years later bow-ties are forgotten and English has been reduced to a scattering of vital nouns and verbs. *Sleep, tired, hungry, hot, cold, run, fight, die,* and so on. Then perhaps one of the priesthood gets to work on the problem of Time. By a miracle he manages to crash through the veil separating age from age, and for the sake of experiment he sends Mok out and down the years as a courier. If all Time exists simultaneously on different levels, then Caesar's Rome and Charlemagne's France, Elizabeth's England and Lincoln's America are all still active, still going through their endless destined round of events like so many records on an automatic phonograph. And if the past coexists with the present, what follows?"

"That the future does also?"

Jervis nodded, saying.

"I believe that Mok was an emissary from the Future. Through him you and I are privileged to know what the Future may be like, a time of bestiality and savagery where throats are cut and learning hides behind the walls of the temple. And this is to be brought about by some vast and devastating war, a war destroying all decency and all faith in God or man. Mr. Dicey, we stand on the threshold of this disaster. Perhaps we have been chosen as prophets for our time. Perhaps we can revise the Future and save mankind from annihilation. But for us the fight will be bitter. Two against the forces of darkness abroad in the world today. Are we partners, Mr. Dicey?"

He had offered a lean nicotine-stained hand. I grasped it. For I had found a friend.

This brings my share in the world's warning to a close. Humanity now has its chance. The choice lies fairly in our hands. Dr. Jervis and I have done our best. Gentlemen, the rest is up to you!

Signed Paul Dicey, A.B., A.M.

Signed Carlton Jervis, M.D. *(Witness)*

THE END

SPEED WILL BE MY BRIDE

By DAVID H. KELLER

Author of "The Thirty and One," etc.

The fastest woman on earth might imaginably make a good housekeeper—but not the fastest horse!

"Don't ask any questions," I snapped. "Just get those horseshoes off as fast as you can!"

THE Olympics for 1980 were over.

Once again the fleet footed Jean Thurlow had won all the short distance races, all the hurdles and even two of the longer distances. In addition, she had broken the world's record for the broad jump and the discus throw. The only thing to prevent her from winning a few of the male events was her sex.

The papers spoke of her as a freak, a white blackbird, an unusual combination of nervous energy, muscular strength and feminine body. There had never been such a woman; it was thought there never would be another one like her. She was just different, and by being so she attracted the eyes of an envious world.

To all praise and adulation, she turned an infinitely indifferent back, accompanied with a shrug of her superb shoulders. She frankly stated

that she did not care what anyone thought of her or said of her; all she wanted to do was to run, and she did wish that somewhere in the world there was a woman who could make things at least a little interesting for her in a race.

Naturally, the other female contestants cordially hated her. They admitted her ability but thought that she might be a trifle cordial in her victorious moments. The men all fell in love with her and spent long hours trying to tell her so. Just as if that did any good! What time had a woman like Jean Thurlow to think of love?

There was only one man who in any way appealed to her. That was Mike Brentus, her trainer. He had met her eight years ago when she was sweeping everything before her in the High School class. He saw, in the immature girl, the promise of future greatness, and from that first day became her shadow. Wisely he never tried to change her style, but had advised her in a thousand little details, and ultimately regulated much of her life. He told her what to eat and when to eat it, how often to practice and when to spend days in glorious idleness. More and more she depended on him and recognized his share in her growing greatness as a woman athlete. He asked for and received a modest salary plus expenses. Year by year the two became vitally important to each other.

Mike Brentus was a small, ugly man, a Greek.

And that was just one more reason I had for detesting him.

I was in love with Jean Thurlow. Perhaps a thousand men had been in love with her, but I was in earnest. For eight years I had followed her over the earth, watching her win a thousand races, and never once had I been able to come even near winning myself. Of course, she was kind to me, promised to be a sister and all that sort of thing, but when it came to marriage she simply laughed in my face.

"Why should I marry?" she used to ask me. "Mike tells me that I shall still be the fastest woman on earth till I am past thirty; why should I risk everything by marriage?"

"But other women champions have married and kept on winning," I argued. "Many tennis and golf leaders have been married women."

"But not one on the track."

"I have the statement of a half dozen eminent physicians that marriage would not interfere with your speed."

"What do they know about it?"

"At least they have a right to an opinion. Besides, you are not going to race all your life. The time will come when you will want a home, a husband, and children. I know it."

"Bah!" sneered the chestnut haired beauty. "Now you can go for the rest of the day and I don't care if I never see you again. Mike and I get tired of your hanging around all the time."

"What has Mike to say as to whom you should associate with?" I demanded angrily.

"Everything. He has done more for me than you ever could do in a thousand years."

I left her in a rage; the next day when I called on her I was told that she was not at home. The Olympics were over; everybody was leaving California.

Following an idea of mine, I went to New York by plane. But only to find that Jean Thurlow and Mike Brentus had left for France the day before.

It seemed to be a good time to blot the girl out of my memory; I stayed in New York and did some gambling on the Stock Exchange. When I finally became sane and remembered that I was in love and always should be, Jean Thurlow was lost. My detectives traced

her to Paris and finally to Florence; but there they lost her.

It was interesting to see how completely she dropped out of the sporting pages. Other women became champions merely because Jean was either dead or had decided to marry and retire. There was absolutely no good reason for thinking so, but I could not get rid of the idea that she had married Mike Brentus.

If she had, and I ever found them, I was sure that I should have to kill him. She would have listened to me if it had not been for the ugly Greek.

THE following January I went to the races in New Orleans. As a rule I never cared much for horse racing, still less for the crooked type of gambling that made the race track a close second to the Stock Exchange when it came to trimming lambs. But this year, as thousands of other Americans, I was interested in a new horse that seemed likely to become the greatest money winner in the history of the American track.

No one seemed to know very much about her except that she had never lost a race. The horse did not even have a fancy name indicating her pedigree. She was simply called THE CHESTNUT MARE.

Evidently she had been brought over from Europe. The New Orleans track was the first she had been raced on. From the first race it was apparent that she outclassed anything brought to Louisiana. The colored boy who rode her was an indifferent jockey; in no way could her continued victories be attributed to his skill. He did not pretend to control her in any way.

"No, Suh!" he stated to the newspaper men. "My orders is to just stay on the saddle. That 'ere gal runs her own races."

So, I went to New Orleans to see the Chestnut Mare win.

Incidentally I tried to find out what I could about the horse. That was not much, but it was interesting, not only to me, but to every one who was following the races.

The owner was said to be a little man by the name of Casey Jones. He took all care of the horse except when the jockey was riding her. No one was allowed in her box stall; it was rumored that Jones never left the horse but slept on the straw in the stall. The other owners tried to be nice to him but Jones told them in so many words that he did not want any of their company, certainly none of their advice. Peculiar conduct for a race track man.

I thought it was all gossip, much of it from envy. Naturally, they would not like this man Jones to take away the best prize, day after day, make their horses look like cow ponies. But there was one fact that could not be gossip. A thousand people knew it to be a fact. The Chestnut Mare was not shod!

As far as anyone could remember she was the only horse ever raced under such peculiar conditions. The proper shoeing of a race horse was considered a most important factor in his speed; yet, here was a horse that was raced, day after day, unshod.

When I heard that, I determined to see the owner, Casey Jones. That was not hard to do. I passed him, exercising his horse under wraps, the very next morning. Casey Jones? An Irishman? I had to laugh, for the man leading the horse was none other than the Greek, Mike Brentus!

He pretended not to recognize me. Perhaps he really did not know me; I made no effort even to exchange glances with him. I wanted to go somewhere and think. Lots of things had to be explained. So, all the rest of the morning I spent in my hotel room thrashing it out and even drawing triangular dia-

grams; all my thinking got nowhere except into a nightmare of impossible phantasmagoria.

Afternoon found me at the race track in a choice seat in a box. I placed a bet on a few horses, but not a cent on the Chestnut Mare. Her continued victories had made the odds so greatly in her favor that only a few were betting on her. In fact, it would have been better for her admirers if she had lost occasionally.

They did not bet on her, but how they rose in applause when she was led on the track and the little negro got in the saddle! No need of starting devices for a horse like that. She just stood at the gate in absolute indifference to the plunging steeds around her; when the race was started she was anything but indifferent. She took the lead and never was challenged. The best horses of the South simply trailed her. Following her through my glasses, I was impressed with the fact that she was winning without effort.

"And that is fifteen thousand more for Casey Jones," yelled a man on my left. "I am going to follow that mare wherever she goes. There is nothing on four legs in the states that can even make it interesting for her."

That seemed to be the general opinion.

The next six months were busy and interesting ones for me. The horse went North to Baltimore and Saratoga and finally ended in the Blue Grass of Kentucky. Casey Jones went with her. The little nigger jockey kept on riding her to victory; I kept on watching from the stands, placing an occasional bet and losing a lot of sleep thinking the matter over and drawing diagrams. But I was careful to keep out of the way of the Greek. When the time came for me to kill him, I did not want him to be able to protect himself.

I was sure that I had to kill him. He either had to tell me where Jean Thurlow was or die; I was sure that he had to die anyway when I found out the answer to my question.

WE all finally arrived at Lexington. By that time the Chestnut Mare had earned over a half million for her owner. The race at Lexington was a specially arranged one between the Mare and Tug-of-War. A purse of fifty thousand had been offered the winner; it was rumored that the owners had made a side bet of exactly three hundred thousand dollars. That was a lot of money.

As far as the records were concerned it was anybody's race. Tug-of-War had never lost a race; his time was as fast as any made by the Chestnut Mare. The only possible argument was over any reserve strength and speed possessed by each horse. Up to the present time the Mare had never been threatened, while Tug-of-War had won several of his races by a narrow margin.

We arrived at Lexington a week before the race. The hotels were already filled. The late arrivals would have to sleep in bathtubs and on billiard tables. It was estimated that more money would be bet than had ever been ventured on any one race in America. Everyone had his own opinion, was ready to back it up with argument and cash. I sent to New York and obtained two million in ten thousand dollar bank notes. I was not sure how I was going to use it, but I was determined in some way that the Greek had to talk before we left Lexington; after he talked, I was going to kill him.

He paid no attention to my invitation to visit me at my hotel. This made it necessary to go to the track. It was full moon and just two days before the race. They told me he was in the box stall with his horse, and he was well guarded beside. Taking no chances on

any one's slipping dope to the mare. But I finally made him come out and talk to me. We leaned against the whitewashed fence.

"What you want?" he whispered. "Make it snappy."

"Not much," I replied. "But why bet only three hundred thousand on the mare? She is bound to win."

He sighed,

"That is all I could safely bet. Had to save something."

"I am betting exactly a million on the mare," I said softly. "Just exactly one million; if it rains between now and the race, I will bet more."

"What has that to do with her winning?" he asked sharply.

Unless it rains, the track will be hard," I whispered back. "If there is only a few seconds difference between them, the advantage will be with the shod horse. You have never shod the mare, but she has never had to race on a track as hard as this one. She will pound her hoofs to pieces."

"Let her do it," he sneered. "I am sick of her anyway. If I win this race, I am going to sell her and clear out with the winnings."

"She is a good horse," I said.

"What hell you know about her? She's the Devil!"

"Then here is your chance to be rid of her. Win or lose, I'll give you two hundred thousand for her right now. And I'll bet a million on her and give you half the winnings if she comes in ahead. That, with your side bet, makes you rich for the rest of your life."

"Say that over again," he urged. "I am not sure I got you."

"Money talks," I said, "and here it is, the two hundred thousand, in ten thousand dollar bills. All you have to do is to write out the sale and make me the owner. You can go ahead and take care of the horse till after the race."

He wrote a bill of sale, right there, with the paper against the whitewashed fence, by the light of the moon; I counted out his money for him, then I wrote an agreement, giving him half of my winnings; between us, it was a fair half hour's work.

He seemed satisfied.

Feeling that I had him in my power, I decided to wait—till after the race—then, unless he told me all I suspected, I would kill him; perhaps I would anyway.

"We are partners now," I told him as I left, "and you have more reason than ever for wanting your horse to win. Think over what I told you about that track. If you decide to shoe the mare, have the best man in town do the work and pay him enough so he will not be tampered with."

The next day the milling crowds had a lot to talk about. My million was finally covered, but there was not much money left to be bet on Tug-of-War. It looked as though the final bettor would have trouble placing his bet. The odds favored the Chestnut Mare. Meanwhile, the track grew harder and harder. Then came the news that threw the crowds into a delirium of excitement. The Chestnut Mare was being shod!!

AFTER that the odds changed. Almost everyone wanted to bet on Tug-of-War. A few favored ones had witnessed the shoeing and came back with the opinion that the mare was ruined for life. She had fought in every way possible, bit, kicked, resisted the shoeing till she was covered with a white lather.

"I never heard a horse cry the way that mare did," said one man. "They had to hog tie her, literally wrap her in harness and throw her before they could get the shoes on. Jackson, the blacksmith, said he would not do it again for twice what Casey Jones paid

him. But he did a sweet job. The mare looks grand shod; but it must have taken a lot out of her."

I hunted the Greek up. With my mustache and Vandyke he never came within a thousand miles of recognizing me.

"You took my advice," I said, sounding him out.

"Yes," he replied anxiously, "and if you had not bought her I would have put a shotgun to her head after the race, win or lose. I am tired of fooling with her."

"But she has made you rich!"

"Sure, but look at the price I paid. I have had to live with her all these months, to keep her from being doped, hamstrung. I'll clean up on this and then you can take care of her."

"Did the shoeing hurt her?"

"No. Why shouldn't a horse be shod? Just a notion of hers not to. Didn't hurt her. Just fought the way she did because she could not have her own way. Matter of pride."

"You talk as though you were drunk," I sneered.

"Well, I am not. You had better take a few shots yourself before you go into her boxstall after the race. She is the devil right after she wins."

The next day was clear. The track dry, hard and fast.

I went to see the little colored boy that noon, just an hour before the race.

"You have got to win, Peter," I told him.

He rolled his white eyes.

"Don't talk that way to me, Boss. I'se gwine to stick on the saddle and that's all. Once the race starts the mare is gwine to run it 'cording to her own notions."

The horses came out to the starting gate. Fifty thousand people became frantic, then silent, as they waited for the race to start. The Greek was on my right. I turned to him,

"All over but the shouting, Mike Brentus, and you are a rich man. Now tell me about it. What did you do with Joan Thurlow?"

He laughed at me.

"And you thinking all the time I didn't know you, John Speath. That is the joke of it. Sure, I am a rich man, and you are helping me. The mare is yours after the race, and you're welcome to her. Joan? Didn't you know? Do you mean you paid all that money just for a horse? She was wild about racing. Beat everything on two legs and thought she could beat everything on four. We visited my grandmother in Florence, and she loaned me her witch's bridle. Ever hear of it? Put the bit into the mouth of a human and he turns into a horse. Joan and I agreed to try it out in America and clean up a million. We did, but I have the million. She was the devil to live with, woman or horse; you can have her from now on. I'm through."

I look at him in astonishment.

"You're drunk! Insane!"

"Am I? If you want the shock of your life, take the bridle off. Win or lose this race, she's going to be sore as Hell—"

BUT the race started just then and he never finished his statement.

It was a two mile race, four times around the track and for the first three circuits there was not a difference of a neck between the two horses at any time. They were running easy, so much so that it was hard to realize that every circuit was breaking the track record. If there was any difference between the horses, their performance and their reserve strength, it certainly did not show, at least, not to me. On the last lap they retained this same equality till they reached the three quarter mark, and then something happened that electrified the crowd. The Chest-

nut Mare ceased to run. She broke, not into a gallop, but into a succession of mighty jumps, each of which increased her lead over Tug-of-War. The length of these jumps was later measured and for the next decade was the cause of boundless dispute. The fact remained that she came across the line more like a jackrabbit than a horse, with a trembling and frightened jockey holding on for his life. Tug-of-War lost the race by fifty feet and broke his heart in doing so. He never raced again.

Mike Brentus slapped me on the back as he shouted in my ear,

"She came through! Great girl, Joan is. Let's collect the winnings and then I am off. You're welcome to her."

We fought our way to the Judge's stand. They had blankets on the Chestnut Mare and a floral collar around her neck. It was not necessary for the Judges to say who had won; everybody knew that. All the track officials wanted to congratulate the Greek. He explained to them that he had sold the horse to Mr. John Speath, and introduced the new owner. Then he went too far. If he had turned around and left the track, he might have been alive today, but he had to go over to the mare and pat her on the nose. She turned on him like a tiger, gripped the side of his neck with her teeth; she shook him like a terrier would a rat, threw him to the ground, and before anyone could even start to stop her, she had tramped him to death beneath her shod hoofs.

The stable hands finally pulled her off by sheer force and we led her back to her box stall. The race, the heavy betting, the unusual victory and the murder at the end of it all gave the audience their money's worth.

I posted guards, told them that I was not to be interrupted under any circumstances, and went to the Chesnut Mare's stall.

As soon as she entered the box stall the poor animal took a drink of water and lay down. Rather unusual conduct for any horse, let alone a blooded racer. I found a three legged stool and sat down on it to watch the horse. She was breathing hard.

Going over to her, I unfastened and took off the bridle.

Rushing to the door I flung it open and called for one of the guards.

"Get an ambulance here as soon as you can. From the nearest hospital, and hurry, HURRY!"

And I carried the woman out to the ambulance myself, wrapped up in the horse blanket, her chestnut hair falling in profusion over her dead white face.

I carried her to the operating room.

The surgeon came in, the best I could secure at short notice.

He gave one look at the woman on the table.

"What the—?" he asked me.

"Don't swear and don't ask any questions," I commanded, "but get those horse shoes off her hands and feet as quick as you can; don't let her die while you are doing it."

Back in bed Jean Thurlow recovered consciousness for just a moment. I bent over her. She opened her eyes,

"Hullo, John," she whispered.

"Hullo, Jean, everything is all right. I love you. Go to sleep."

"Is Mike dead, John? I can't remember what happened."

"Everything is all right, Jean. Just go to sleep."

Five minutes later the end came. Acute dilation of the heart, the surgeon said,

"And how about those horse shoes, Mr. Speath. Can't you tell me the story?"

"Give them to me," I demanded. "You wouldn't understand, anyway."

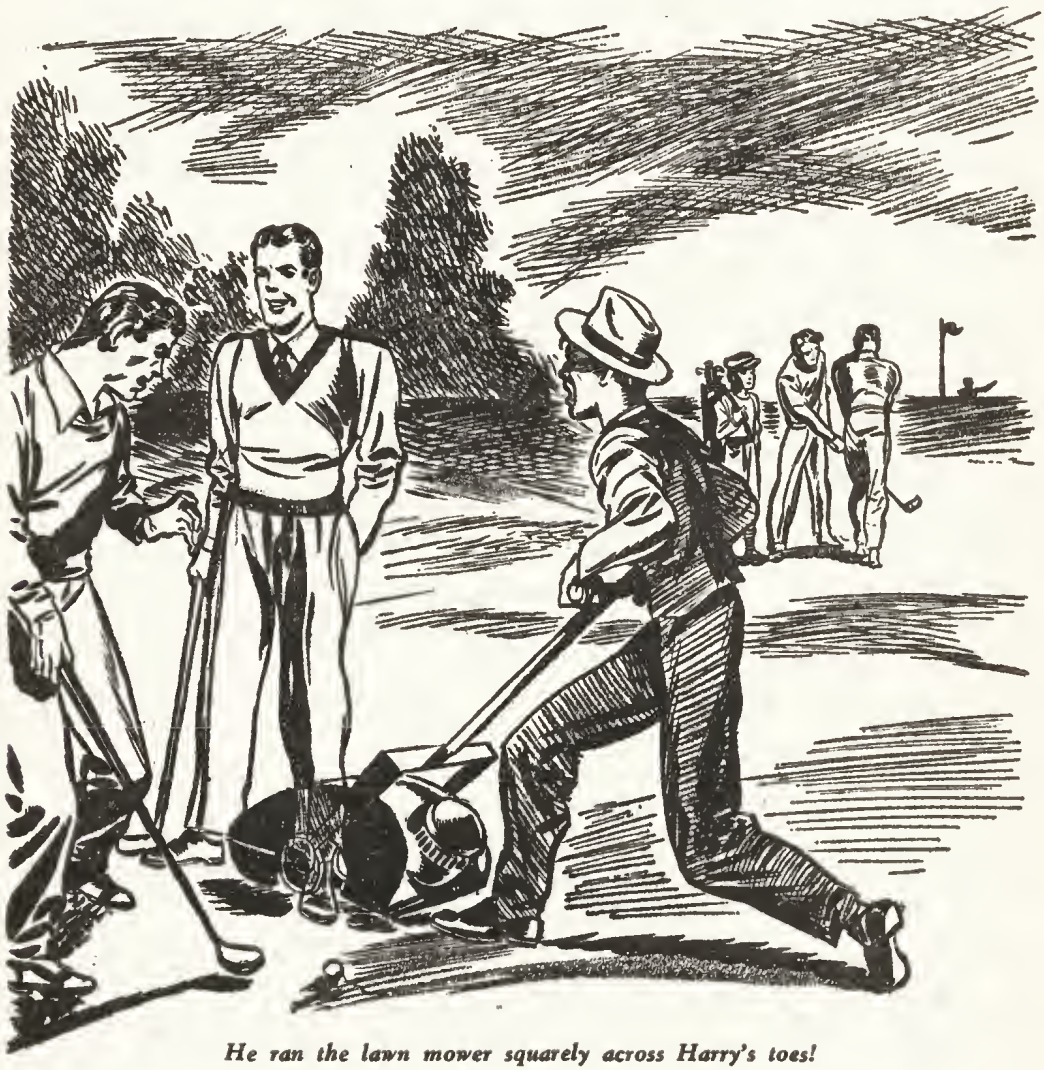
So out of the hospital I walked, with the horseshoes in my pocket and the bridle over my arm.

MEET MY BROTHER—MR. GHOST!

By WAYNE D. OVERHOLSER

Author of "Time-Trap," etc.

Sure, I could see my brother, and talk to him, and touch him, the trouble was other people—they couldn't!



He ran the lawn mower squarely across Harry's toes!

JAMES RUNDEM taught Junior English in Lake City's High School. He was a fastidious little man, 32, a bachelor, and had a way of keeping himself perfectly immaculate. His apartment was the same way, every book and chair in its exact place. No trace of dirt or paper on the floor, or anything else that shouldn't be there.

Because James was the way he was, he had few friends, and people thought him a bit queer. Not that they didn't respect him. He was an excellent teacher in an academic way, and what he didn't know about world literature and the mysteries of technical grammar would make a small volume indeed, but folks were inclined to let him live his

life and do it alone, so James had no real friends but his brother Harry who worked on a newspaper in Millsport fifty miles away, and Esther Mandell who taught Senior English.

Esther was thirty, and pretty, although a bit teacherish. She had an apartment down the hall from James', and they spent a good deal of time together. All in a professional way, you understand. Philosophy of education, the proper literature for young Americans, the best type of English tests. That was the sort of things they talked about, and if anybody had mentioned romance to Esther, she would have blushed, caught her breath, and indignantly contended that such thoughts had never come to her mind.

James would have said the same thing, even to Harry, but to himself he admitted the truth. He was in love with Esther. He was tired of cooking his meals, of sweeping. Tired of being alone, but no one would have guessed that from the outward appearance of James Rundem. He often thought of proposing to Esther, but the bonds of habit are strong, and it had long been his habit to allow no one to know his real feelings. Besides, it was hard to say anything when the only woman a man would think about marrying is an apparently very self sufficient teacher.

James visited with his brother Harry quite often. They were as opposite as the poles. Harry had a sense of humor that often burst forth into uproarious fits of laughter. He liked to swear, particularly in front of Esther because it never failed to shock her. Whenever Harry came to Lake City, he always insisted on James taking him to visit Esther, and James always ended by going, although he knew it didn't make Esther think any more of him.

The one great thing that James and Harry had in common was their love for golf, a strange hobby for a man like James who on other ways was only a lover of books. Both were fair players, shooting somewhere in the nineties. The rivalry between them was a live and vital thing, and both had ambitions to bring their scores into the eighties.

It was in the spring of James' third year in Lake City that he succumbed to temptation, and brought a new set of Bobby Jones' woods. He wrote to Harry about them that night, bragging a little as to what he'd do the next time they met. Two days later he received a card, saying that Harry could still beat him if he had the best woods in the world, and that Harry would be in on the eleven o'clock stage Saturday morning.

When James met the stage, he thought at first Harry hadn't come. Then he discovered him sitting in one of the back seats. Harry was the last one out, and as he stepped down, James saw that his right arm was in a sling.

Something queer happened then. The driver had been at the back of the stage taking out luggage. Evidently he thought of something he wanted, for he walked quickly along the bus, and just as Harry's foot touched the sidewalk, the driver brushed past him with no word of apology, and went on into the bus. The strange part of it was that the driver apparently didn't see Harry, yet Harry was in plain view.

James blinked and wondered what was wrong with his eyes. What he had seen couldn't be real. THE DRIVER'S BODY HAD PASSED THROUGH HARRY'S LEFT SIDE.

HARRY was standing in front of James extending his left hand, and James came out of his daze long enough to shake it. No, what he'd seen couldn't be what had taken place. It must have been a visual illusion, caused, perhaps, by the angle from which James was viewing the two men.

"No golf game today, I guess," Harry said, deep regret in his voice. "I was in a car smash up this morning. Got a sprain in my right wrist, a crack on the head and in the back, but I thought I'd come anyhow. I want to see just how good you are with those new woods."

"Sure," James said mechanically, "glad to have you. I'll play a round this afternoon, and you can give me your expert advice."

"Expert?" Harry's eyes widened in pretended amazement, "and I always had the feeling that you thought you were the expert."

James didn't answer that remark. The driver had gone into the hotel, and James waited until the doors swished shut behind him. Then he said in a low voice, "Didn't that driver give you quite a bump as you were getting out of the bus?"

"Driver?" Harry looked around wonderingly. "No, didn't notice it."

Probably his glasses needed changing, James decided, although he hadn't been aware that anything was wrong with his eyes. As a matter of fact, he'd had his eyes checked up only six months ago.

"My car's down here a block," and as Harry fell in beside him, James was aware of two boys staring at him in a most peculiar fashion. He had a glimpse of one of the boys making a circle with his finger beside his head. "Mean little ruffians," he thought, and then wondered if he were seeing something else that wasn't there.

"Had quite a smash up," Harry was saying. "Clay Burk was bringing me down to the stage depot. We were a little late, and he was goosing it pretty hard. Made a turn too fast and smacked into the side of a truck. Sure made mince meat out of Clay's coupe. I was just a block from the depot then, so I came on. Fixed up this sling myself."

They had reached the car now, and as James slid under the wheel, he said, "Maybe you'd better have a doctor look you over."

"I'll be all right," Harry shrugged. "Just can't swing a golf club for awhile, damn it."

James drove the half dozen blocks to his apartment house, and as they walked into the building, James said, "I'll fix up a lunch, and then we'll drive out to the golf course."

The cleaning woman was running the vacuum just inside the door as James made the remark. She turned to stare after them, a curious smile on her lips.

"Must be something wrong with us," James muttered as he unlocked his apartment door. "People staring as if we were a couple of freaks."

"Hadn't noticed it," Harry said carelessly. "Well, how's my good friend Esther. I'll bet she's tickled to know I was coming."

"I didn't tell her," James answered shortly. "I don't suppose you'll see her this time. She's very busy."

"Not see her?" Harry almost shouted. "Say, I always see her. Why, she's one of the attractions that brings me to Lake City. She couldn't be so busy she couldn't see me." He slapped his leg and roared his laugh.

James didn't say anything more. It was Harry's old game, and he'd have his fun for all James could do. He'd go to see Esther alone if James didn't go, and that certainly wouldn't do, so they'd wind up by both going just as they always did.

It was nearly one o'clock by the time James had lunch ready. Harry sat down, stared at the plate of salad, and shook his head. "I don't feel like eating. I'll just sit here and watch you."

"Let's get going," Harry urged as soon as James had finished.

"I'll clean up and be with you in a minute," James started piling dishes into the sink.

"You're like an old setting hen," Harry growled. "Why don't you marry Esther and let her do the dishes?"

"I wouldn't marry Esther." James appeared horrified at the thought.

"No," Harry mocked, "just like the Germans wouldn't take London if they could. She'd marry you all right if it weren't for me. I bet she'd hate to have a brother-in-law like me cluttering up her place."

HARRY didn't offer to dry the dishes, sat slouched in a chair smoking while James carefully washed and dried the dishes and put them in the cupboard in their exact place.

"Getting worse each time I come," Harry grumbled. "Gotta have everything just so. You need a woman damned bad, brother."

Still grumbling, Harry followed James out of the apartment. They passed a couple in the hall, but no stares followed them this time, much to James' relief.

When they stepped out of the car at the golf course, Harry said, "Get your clubs. I'll be out in front."

James took his bag out of the locker, and bought a new seventy-five cent ball. He needed everything in his favor if he were going to astonish Harry with his long drives.

"I'm playing around by myself," he said as he paid for the ball. "My brother's just going to walk around with me."

"Your brother down?"

"Came this morning," James nodded. "He has a sprained wrist or he'd play, too. He's waiting beside the practice green."

The man peered out of the window. "Don't see him."

Harry was sitting on a bench not more than thirty yards from the club house. No reason why the man couldn't see him.

"Right on that bench," James said a little irritably. "Just past the drinking fountain."

"Nope, don't see him," the man repeated, "must have walked off. Too bad he can't play with you."

James picked up his bag and stalked out. He wasn't the only man who needed new glasses. Anybody who couldn't see thirty yards in broad daylight was practically blind.

"Let's see you get that three hundred yard drive," Harry grinned as if he knew James couldn't hit one-half that distance. He showed no particular interest in the new clubs.

Still a little irked, James took a few practice swings, set his ball up on a tee, and topped it. It rolled a bare fifty yards. Harry snorted.

"Three hundred yards," he jeered, "boy, it's too bad I can't play today. I'd take you so bad it wouldn't be a game."

Without a word, James picked up his bag, walked stiffly to where the ball had stopped, and with his brassie, put it on the green. Harry admitted it was a nice shot, and when James wound up with a par, Harry went so far as to admit it might be a good game if he could play.

"You see, it's the second shot that counts," James said loftily.

"Yeah, sure," Harry grunted, "I know. You weren't warmed up yet."

From there on to the ninth hole, James played over his head, parring all but one, and a birdie evened that up. Then on the ninth hole another of the strange things happened that had been plaguing him since Harry had arrived. It was a short, three par hole, and James laid the ball on the green twenty feet from the cup.

"You're really hitting them today," Harry admitted. "Best nine holes I ever saw you play."

A man was cutting the grass on the ninth green, and he waited while James

dropped the ball in two putts.

"How are you doing today, Mr. Rundem?" he asked courteously.

"Pretty well," James nodded as he replaced the pin, and dropped his putter into the bag.

"Too bad you have to play alone," the man said.

"Oh, I don't mind. My brother's giving me his moral support. He'd play if he didn't have a sprained wrist."

"Your brother?" the man looked around in surprise. His gaze went past Harry who was standing on the edge of the green. His eyes came back to James, an oddly frightened look in them. Suddenly he began pushing his lawn mower again, and ran it squarely across Harry's toes.

Harry didn't move. After the lawn mower had gone on, Harry walked toward James, and said, "Well, you can't keep this up much longer."

James started to say something, to reprimand the fellow for an act that must have been done maliciously, and shut his mouth again. He was facing a mystery that was beyond him. He swung the golf bag to his shoulder, and caught up with Harry, the ice cube feeling in the bottom of his stomach that a man has when he runs into something that can't be reality.

"Didn't that fellow run the lawn mower over your toes?" he asked.

"Didn't notice it," Harry said. "Well, let's see you blast this one out."

FROM there on in James couldn't hit anything. He sliced out of bounds, hit sand traps, and drove three balls into the lake on the seventeenth hole. Harry began to jeer.

"I knew you couldn't keep it up," he gloated. "Par golf isn't your game, brother."

James knew what was the matter, but he didn't tell Harry. There was something else strange, too. On every green James had pulled the pin and replaced it after he'd sunk his putt. Ordinarily Harry would have done it. There was nothing wrong with his left hand, but he never offered to touch the pin. Merely stood at the edge of the green until James had holed out.

By the time James had finished up with his usual ninety-five, his nerves were so tight he was dubbing every shot. No use asking his brother about these impossible things that were happening. Harry wouldn't have had the slightest idea.

James put his clubs in the locker and walked to the car. Harry was standing beside it, grinning derisively.

"A ninety-five," he chuckled. "Played par golf on one nine, and you were absolutely lousy on the second. Looks like you need more than new clubs to fix up your game."

"I guess so," James agreed, and stepped on the starter.

It was six o'clock when they got back to the apartment, and Harry began talking about seeing Esther.

"Are you staying here tonight?" James asked.

"Hell no," Harry shook his head. "I'm taking the eight o'clock stage back."

"Let's go down town and have dinner. We'll have time to see Esther after that."

"O. K.," Harry nodded, "but don't try to talk me out of it. I've got to see her."

James was hoping desperately he could find some way to keep Harry away from Esther. It was bad enough any time when they were together. Today it would be tragic.

They walked down town, and it seemed to James that every time he said anything, people stopped on the street and stared at them. They turned into a restaurant on Main Street, and took a booth in the back. The waitress

brought one glass of water and set it in front of James.

"My brother will want a glass of water, too," James said sharply.

"Your brother?" The girl stared at him, frowned, and went away. When she returned with the second glass, she placed it in front of James.

Harry was studying the menu that James had opened and slid across the table to him. "Lamb chops," he said.

"I'll have that order, too," James folded the menu.

"You'll have what?" the girl said uneasily.

She should have been able to hear Harry. James thought maybe she was a little deaf, so he said rather loudly, "Two orders of lamb chops."

The waitress glared as if she wanted to say her ears were all right, whirled, and stalked away angrily.

"Good looking girl," Harry's eyes followed her approvingly.

"She should have a lesson in manners," James said angrily. "I don't see how a girl like that can hold down a job here."

"I hadn't noticed it," Harry shrugged. "You act kinda snippy yourself, brother. Those last nine holes get you down?"

James thought of saying that if these crazy things kept happening, he'd be crazy. He didn't because Harry was acting as if everything was as it should be, so he only said, "I guess so," and wondered how long this was going to last.

When the waitress came with the food, she placed one order in front of James, the other in the center of the table. She didn't look at James, but her face was the greenish white of a thoroughly scared person who was facing a terrible and dangerous situation. That puzzled James because certainly neither he nor his brother looked vicious. Maybe something else had taken place he didn't know about. Perhaps she'd received the calling down for her bad manners that she justly deserved.

James scooted the dishes across the table that belonged to Harry.

"Go ahead. No doubt you're hungry after walking around with me, and no lunch either."

HARRY stared at the food and shook his head. "You know, it's a funny thing. I couldn't eat the best meal in the world. I didn't know it till just now. My back's hurting like hell."

"You'd better see a doctor. You probably received more of an injury than you think you did."

"Maybe," Harry nodded. "I will when I get back to Millsport."

James toyed with his food, but he discovered that he wasn't hungry, either. He shoved back his plate. This had been the most horrible day of his life, and it wasn't over.

"I don't want my dinner," he said.

Harry got up. "Let's go then. Don't forget I've got to see Esther."

James knew he was in for it. He paid the bill and they went out. The only thing he could hope for was that Esther might be gone, but he knew she wouldn't because last night she'd said she had too many papers to grade to accept his invitation for a ride on Sunday.

On the way back to the apartment house James was careful not to say anything when anybody was within distance. Harry kept up a continuous stream of talk, but for some peculiar reason, none of the people they passed seemed to find anything queer in that.

James knocked on Esther's door, still hoping that she might be gone. Harry moved to one side so she wouldn't see him.

The door opened and Esther stood there, smiling at James.

"Good evening, James. Come in. I

was hoping you'd drop around."

"Good evening," James said glumly. She wouldn't be so pleased when she saw Harry. "Harry's here. He said he couldn't go back without seeing you."

"Oh," the smile faded from Esther's face. "Well, come in, both of you."

James stepped aside. Harry was grinning broadly as he went in, and James followed him, wondering what new kind of freak thing would happen now.

"Howdy, Esther," Harry poked her in the ribs.

"Harry," James said. Harry had never done anything that bad before.

Esther stared at James, stepped into the hall, and looked around.

"Where is Harry?" she asked. "I thought you said he was here."

"He is. Sitting right in front of you." This was worse than the man on the golf course who couldn't see Harry from the club house. He was sitting in Esther's easy chair not more than five feet in front of her. After all, Harry was no midget. It wasn't possible for anybody with any vision at all not to see a man six feet tall and who weighed one hundred and seventy pounds.

"Will you please show me what chair Harry is sitting in?" Esther ordered crisply.

James advanced to the easy chair and held his forefinger within a foot of Harry's nose.

"Esther," James said patiently, "you've seen my brother Harry a dozen times. This is he sitting right here."

There was the funny look in Esther's eyes when she looked at James, the same look he'd seen all day.

"James, there's nobody in that chair."

Harry began to laugh, his roaring guffaw that always made Esther look at him as if he were some hoodlum who had no business appearing in polite society.

"Damn it, James," Harry slapped his leg and roared again, "she's sure giving me the cold treatment this time. Can't even see me."

For once the damned fool didn't cause Esther to raise her eyebrows.

"Now listen, Esther," James knew his great store of patience was nearly exhausted, "Harry has been with me since eleven o'clock this morning. He hurt his arm in a car accident so he couldn't play golf, but he did walk around the course. He came in here with me and he's sitting in that chair. I don't give a hoot in hell whether you like Harry or not, but you have no right to stand there and say you can't see him."

James' "hoot in hell" brought Esther's eyebrows up, but she seemed to understand now. She came up to James, laid a soft hand on his arm, and said tenderly, more tenderly than he had ever heard her speak to him before, "You've been working too hard, James. I've been afraid of something like this. A person can't go on driving himself all the time. Now you come and lie down. I'll call a doctor."

SHE thought he was crazy! Maybe he was. That thought sent a knife thrust down his spine. All day folks acted as if he were a little off. He glanced at Harry. Harry winked at him. He was there, all right. It was Esther. Either she was crazy, blind, or she was just being nasty. That was it. She was being childish and thought she was getting even for all the things Harry had done to her.

Esther was still tugging at his arm, trying to pull him toward the davenport. James jerked loose.

"I know Harry hasn't always been a gentleman around you," he said evenly, "but his conduct doesn't merit this kind of treatment. Come on, Harry."

James turned, his shoulders back,

and walked out. He didn't stop until he was in his own apartment. Harry followed him in, for once looking a little abashed.

"Hell," he said, "I didn't think she'd take it that way."

James sank down in a chair and groaned.

"I love her, Harry. I never really was sure before, and now it's too late. She'll never get over this, and you had to poke her in the ribs as if she were a—a—."

"Sure," Harry nodded, "like she was the kind of a gal I go with. I'm sorry, damn it." He lit a cigarette, and threw the match on the floor. James didn't even see it.

"Well," he said dully, "I guess I'll be a bachelor all my life."

"I guess I'd better get down to the stage depot." Harry picked up his hat.

"I'll take you down."

"Don't bother. You go back to your girl and fix it up."

"No," James said vehemently, very vehemently for a man who always kept his emotions in check, "I'll take you down."

They were ten minutes early, so they stepped into the hotel lobby that served as a stage depot, sat down and waited. James didn't talk. He nodded occasionally to show he was listening, or would mumble yes. He felt people's eyes upon him, but he paid no attention. He wouldn't let himself be bothered. He wasn't doing anything peculiar. A man had a right to see his brother off.

The bus drew up in front. The half dozen people got up and went out, James and Harry following.

"Better see a doctor," James said in a low voice as he shook Harry's left hand, "and don't worry about me."

People turned to stare, and grinned slyly at each other.

"Sure," Harry nodded, "and you'd better have a try at Esther. She's worth it. She'd make a good wife for you."

James ran then. He couldn't stand it any longer. He was sane. He'd never been saner in his life. Then he realized that many mental cases considered themselves sane and that the rest of the world was crazy. That thought disturbed him. Maybe he'd better call on Superintendent Wade at his home and resign. He couldn't teach when he was in this condition, and he couldn't stand the public knowing what had happened. He'd slip away somewhere where he could rest.

No, that wasn't the thing to do yet. He thought of the small savings he had in the bank. He had to keep his job. He'd sleep tonight, and maybe he'd be all right tomorrow. A futile thought, no doubt, but he had to be sure.

James drove back to his apartment house. Wearily he went in and lay down on the davenport. His brain felt as if it were tightly bound by steel bands.

A knock on the door. James jumped up. Perhaps that was Esther, coming back to apologize, but when he opened the door, his heart sank. Superintendent Wade stood there, and behind him was Doctor Niles, chairman of the school board.

"Come in," James tried to make his voice cordial, but it sounded flat to his own ears.

"Good evening, Mr. Rundem," Wade smiled pleasantly. "We thought we'd make a call."

"Yes indeed," Niles bobbed his bald head, "just a call."

THEY came in and sat down. A call, James was thinking, but it wasn't a social call. They'd heard what had been happening today, and they'd come to see for themselves what shape he was in. All right, let them see.

"A nice evening," Wade said.

"A very nice evening," Niles echoed.

"Yes, it is a nice evening," James agreed, and wondered why they didn't get at it.

"It's hiring time again, Mr. Rundem." Wade was starting now.

"I hope my work has been satisfactory," James wished he could keep his voice from sounding so hollow. It was like a doomed man facing his executioner, only he wouldn't be lucky enough to go to the gallows. They'd take him to the asylum.

"Very satisfactory, Mr. Rundem," Wade nodded.

"Very satisfactory, indeed," Niles agreed.

"We're calling on the teachers to see if everything is satisfactory," Wade went on. "We're making out the contracts Monday, and I didn't get a chance to see everybody at school yesterday. I presume you wish to be rehired?"

"Yes," James felt a little dazed now.

"That's fine," Wade stood up. "We'll go ahead on that basis then. Good evening."

"Good evening," Niles followed Wade out.

"Good evening," James called after them.

He kept the door open a crack and heard Niles say, "A rather peculiar chap."

"A good teacher, though," Wade answered, and James wondered if this was some more of the same things that had been happening all day.

No sooner than Wade and Niles had disappeared than James had another surprise. Again a knock on the door, and this time it really was Esther. She didn't wait for an invitation, but came in quickly, and held out a yellow envelope.

"A telegram came for you," she said hurriedly as if she weren't sure just what her reception would be. "I had come down to talk to you again, but

you were gone. I was here when the boy came."

James took the envelope, and held it a moment, his eyes on Esther. She was worried, but she wasn't frightened. He saw that.

"Wade and Niles were here a minute ago. They talked about rehiring me, but they had never done anything like this before, making personal calls. I thought maybe you'd phoned Wade, told him I was a bit balmy."

"James," she was horrified, "I wouldn't do anything like that. They called on me, too. You aren't balmy. You're just tired. You need rest."

"I—I," he stammered, "well, Esther, I mean I was afraid you'd hold it against me, what just happened. Harry was there, you know, and I talked rather strong."

Esther backed away a step, and James saw he'd made a mistake saying that Harry had been there.

"You'd better open the telegram. It might be important."

"Nothing's important, Esther," James closed the door. Something was going to happen now, and he didn't want anybody else seeing it. The habit of a life time was dropping away. A man had emotions that shouldn't be kept locked up within him, and this one was coming straight out of his heart. "I mean nothing is as important as the discovery I made. I love you, Esther. I—I thought I'd lost you. I couldn't stand that. I've lived alone so much that maybe I am queer. Will you marry me, Esther?"

"Why, James, I—I," she backed toward the door, but James beat here there and held his back against it.

"You can't go until I know. Nothing else is important." That wasn't the way a man should say it. Flowers and music and a moon, but James didn't have time to arrange those details.

"Your telegram," Esther pointed at

it. She was scared, really scared, but the color in her cheeks made her look prettier than James had ever seen her. She wasn't a school teacher now. She was a woman in love and didn't know it, but James took care of that.

"I said nothing is important until I know." James grabbed her in his arms, a little savagely, but there was fire in his veins he had never felt before.

"James, you mustn't," but that was as far as he let her go. He kissed her, held her to him so that she couldn't move, took a deep breath and kissed her again. Her arms came up around his neck, tightened, and there was a radiant look in her eyes when their lips parted. "I love you, James. I never knew before, either, but I was terribly worried when you left my apartment so angry. I don't mind if Harry comes, and—and teases me."

"I'll break his neck if he does," James said fiercely.

ESTHER giggled like a school girl. "The telegram, James."

"Oh, the telegram." He looked at it blankly, crumpled in his hand, then straightened it out and tore it open.

YOUR BROTHER BADLY HURT IN CAR ACCIDENT THIS MORNING NEAR STAGE DEPOT NECK AND BACK INJURIES HAS RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS NOW AND ASKS FOR YOU WANTS YOU TO BRING SOMEBODY NAMED ESTHER

The room whirled in front of James. Harry really had been hurt. Just recovered consciousness. Some of the truth came to him then. Harry had been here, right here in this apartment, while his battered body had lain in a hospital bed in Millsport.

James held out the telegram to Esther, and after she took it he opened his desk and picked up the card he'd received from Harry.

"Oh James," Esther whispered, "I'm so sorry."

"Look," James held out the card, "you see, he was coming."

Esther read the message on the back of the card. "James, I don't understand. You were so sure he was here, but he wasn't. He couldn't have been."

"I know," James nodded, "I don't understand it either, but this kind of thing does happen. To me he was here, as real as anything I ever have known, but physically he was near death in the hospital. Will you go with me to see him?"

"Of course I'll go."

James made the drive to Millsport in less than an hour, Esther sitting close to him, so indescribably sweet and precious. Then they were talking to a nurse, breathless and tense, waiting for word of Harry's condition.

"He'll be all right," the nurse smiled. "but he's terribly worked up about something. I think he'll be calmed when he has a few words with you."

"Is his right arm injured?" James' heart missed a beat while he waited for her answer that would prove the thing that had happened.

"Why yes," the nurse seemed surprised. "A bad sprain, but it's minor compared to the head and back injuries. How did you know? I didn't mention that in the telegram I sent."

"I knew," was all James said. "May we see him now?"

"Surely."

The nurse led them down the hall, and opening a door, motioned for them to go in. "Just stay a minute."

Harry was on the bed, and only his eyes seemed alive beneath the white bandages. A ghost of a smile came to his pale lips when he saw them.

"I knew you'd come, both of you, but I was scared. I've been blotto all day, they tell me, but I have the damnedest feeling that I was in Lake

City, and I caused you two to break up. Nothing to it, is there? You look like a couple of love birds."

"Not a thing," James assured him. "We are a couple of love birds. We're going to get married as soon as school's out."

"Say, that's swell. They didn't know who to wire until I came around about eight this evening, and I've been thinking since then what a hell of a life we're been living, James. Just you and me, and nobody else to give a damn about what happens to us. It'll be great, knowing there's somebody else that loves James, and maybe cares a little bit about me. I'm sorry the way I've always kidded you, Esther."

"I don't mind, Harry." There was a trace of a tear on Esther's cheek. "I do love James, and I care about you."

"We'd better go now," James said, and grinned when Harry winked at him. "We'll see you again tomorrow."

There was a pleasant, warm feeling within James as he and Esther went out, his arm through hers. If it hadn't been for Harry, he'd never have said the things to Esther he'd wanted to say for so long, never have broken down his life long habits of holding back his feelings if it hadn't been for this strange miracle that had happened today. . . .

FALSE TEETH

$6.85 to $35.00

—BY MAIL—

SEND NO MONEY

Posed by a Professional Model

THE TESTIMONIAL LETTERS WE PUBLISH are communications that customers have sent to us without solicitation and without pay. We have large numbers of such missives. We never print anyone's letter without previous consent. We believe that each of our customers who has written to us enthusiastically indorsing our dental plates is sincere. We do not, however, intimate or represent that you will receive the same results in any instance that those customers describe. What is important to you is that when you pay for our teeth, WE GUARANTEE IF YOU ARE NOT 100% SATISFIED IN EVERY RESPECT WITH THE TEETH WE WILL MAKE FOR YOU, AFTER YOU HAVE WORN THEM AS LONG AS 60 DAYS, WE WILL GLADLY REFUND TO YOU EVERY CENT YOU HAVE PAID US FOR THEM.

BEFORE

AFTER

Mrs. Elsie Boland of Norton, Kansas, writes:

"Enclosed find two pictures. One shows how I looked before I got my teeth; the other one afterwards. Your teeth are certainly beautiful. I have not had mine out since the day I got them, except to clean them."

Mrs. Geo. G. Conklin, Bridgeport, Connecticut, writes:

"I received my set of teeth. I wear them day and night. I have good reason to be well pleased with them. Thank you very much."

Harry Willoughby, Adairville, Kentucky, writes:

"I have received my teeth and am PROUD OF THEM."

MADE - TO - MEASURE DENTAL PLATES DIRECT FROM OUR LABORATORY TO YOU!

We make to measure for you individually—BY MAIL—Dental Plates for men and women—from an impression of your own mouth taken by you at your home. We have thousands of customers all over the country wearing teeth we made by mail at sensible prices.

HAND-CARVED SET

AT ROCK-BOTTOM PRICES

If you find out what others have paid for theirs, you will be astounded when you see how little ours will cost you! By reading our catalog, you will learn how to save half or more on dental plates for yourself. Monthly payments possible.

PARTIAL

ON 60 DAYS' TRIAL

Make us prove every word we say. Wear our teeth on trial for as long as 60 days. Then, if you are not perfectly satisfied with them, they will not cost you a cent.

WITH MONEY - BACK GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION

We take this risk. We guarantee that if you are not completely satisfied with the teeth we make for you, then any time within 60 days we will immediately refund every cent you have paid us for them. We take your word. You are the judge.

ROOFLESS

HIGH-GRADE MATERIAL AND EXPERT WORKMANSHIP

TRY our practically unbreakable ROOFLESS, PARTIAL and TRANSLUCENT plates. Our dentures are set with pearly-white, genuine, porcelain teeth; constructed from high-grade materials, with expert workmanship, to give long service. We make all styles of plates. A dentist who has had many years' experience in making dental plates supervises the making of each plate. . . .

FREE IMPRESSION MATERIAL, Catalog with our new low prices and information. Don't put this off. Do it TODAY! CLIP COUPON OR WRITE. A one cent postcard with name and address plainly written is all that is necessary.

We also Repair or Reproduce Old Plates—48-hour Service

UNITED STATES DENTAL COMPANY

Dr. Ernest French, Supervisor of Laboratory

1555 Milwaukee Ave., Dept. 3-56; Chicago, Ill.

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW

FREE UNITED STATES DENTAL COMPANY

Dept. 3-56, 1555 Milwaukee Ave., CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.

Send, without obligation, your FREE impression material, catalog, and information.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

(Print Clearly)

JOIN THE AMERICAN RED CROSS—A LITTLE MAKES A LOT!

One LIFE INSURANCE POLICY INSURES THEM ALL!

LOOK AT THE AMAZING LOW COST

Only $1 A MONTH

FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY

THIS Guarantee Reserve POLICY INSURES FROM TWO TO SIX MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY . . . FOR AS MUCH AS . . .

$1,422.00 For Natural or Ordinary Accidental Death

$2,844.00 For Auto Accidental Death

$4,266.00 For Travel Accidental Death

(The above figures represent the amount of insurance provided by the policy on a typical average family of five persons)

Insures Men, Women, Children—Ages 1-75

If aching hearts and unbearable grief were all that accompanied death . . . the burden would still be great. But added to that grief and despair are the huge expenses that always follow the footsteps of tragedy. You'll need ready cash to see you through, and unless you carry insurance on each member of your family, some time you're going to have to face these financial burdens.

Computed on Legal Reserve Basis

The **Guarantee Reserve** Policy is brand new . . . it is actuarily sound . . . figured out by leading insurance experts without using the many misleading or confusing "trick clauses" and "hidden phrases" that are contained in so many low cost policies. Seeing is believing . . . that's why we want you to see the policy before you decide to keep it. We want to prove that this is the Policy you should have for your family's protection.

Parents, Children (Married or Unmarried), *Brothers, Sisters, Grandparents, In-Laws,* Included

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION

Selling by mail saves agents' commissions, branch offices, expenses, collection expenses . . . that's why from 2 to 6 members of your family, including relatives, may be included in your **Guarantee Reserve** Family Policy for a total cost of only $1.00 a month. You be the judge . . . decide for yourself without agents to high pressure you . . . without embarrassment or obligation.

Send the coupon below for details of this sound insurance offer made by the reliable **Guarantee Reserve** Life Insurance Company. Don't delay . . . do it now, while you and your family are in good health.

QUESTIONS YOU WILL WANT ANSWERED!

1. **Q.** *Does the death of one or more members of the insured family cancel the Policy?*
   A. No. The policy remains in effect, insuring the balance of the insured family, as long as premiums are paid.
2. **Q.** *How are premiums paid?*
   A. Pay your $1.00 premium monthly. You will receive a receipt and premium notice each month. NO collectors will ever call on or bother you.
3. **Q.** *In what States are policies issued by Guarantee Reserve Life Insurance Company?*
   A. Guarantee Reserve Life Insurance Company is legally entitled to do business by mail in every State in the Union. It is incorporated under Indiana insurance laws.
4. **Q.** *Is a Medical Examination required?*
   A. No. But any members of your family who are not in good health cannot be insured.

NO AGENT WILL CALL

10-DAY FREE INSPECTION OFFER

SEND NO MONEY

MAIL COUPON TODAY!

GUARANTEE RESERVE LIFE INSURANCE CO.
Guarantee Reserve Bldg., Dept. C-37
Indianapolis, Indiana

( ) Please send me your FREE 10-DAY INSPECTION OFFER

NAME.....

ST. OR R.F.D.....

CITY & STATE .....